

**In committee in continuation:**

**MINISTER BURNS' PORTFOLIOS**

**DEPARTMENT OF INFRASTRUCTURE, PLANNING AND ENVIRONMENT**

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** Good morning, everyone. A bit of housekeeping: could we make sure all the mobile phones are switched off and not on silent – totally off the air - because it interferes with the recording mechanism.

I welcome the Minister for Transport and Infrastructure and invite him to introduce the officials accompanying him and, if he wishes, to make an opening statement on behalf of his department.

**Dr BURNS:** Thank you, Mr Chairman. I am joined at the table this morning by Mr Barry Chambers, Chief Executive Officer of the Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Environment. I am sure most members would be aware that this is Barry's last appearance at an estimates hearing - at least in his current role - after a long and very distinguished career in the Northern Territory Public Service. I am sure everyone recognises the fantastic contribution that Barry has made over many years, literally building the Territory. We thank you for that, Barry.

I am also joined by Mr Chris Bigg, Executive Director for Lands; and Mr Ken Tinkham, Chief Financial Officer for the department. I will be joined at the table by other departmental officers as appropriate, as we move through the appropriation for this diverse and innovative department.

I am sure that members of the committee and the agency representatives will find this a most stimulating session. The agencies that I have the honour of having in my ministerial portfolio are some of the major drivers of the Territory's economic development. The Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Environment has, as its guiding principle, the maintenance of the balance between economic development and our unique lifestyle. The department operates under the banner of balancing development and conservation.

The department is a major generator of jobs within the Territory, both directly through the capital works program and indirectly by setting in place the public infrastructure that drives the economic development and establishing the transport framework that serves both urban and remote communities and industry. At the same time, the department is responsible for maintaining and enhancing our unique lifestyle through its functions in Lands and Planning and land management, including the development of parks and protection of biodiversity.

We live in exciting times in the Territory with the completion of the AustralAsia Trade Link; the establishment of the Darwin Business Park; an LNG plant being built in Darwin; the Darwin waterfront project; new land releases in Alice Springs and Darwin; major investment in tourism, marketing and infrastructure throughout the Territory; the development of the Desert Knowledge Centre in Alice Springs; and the development of a new master plan for Territory parks, to name just a few of the major projects that are under way. The Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Environment is a key driver in almost all of these developments. DIPE is, of course, responsible for the design and delivery of much of government's record capital works program.

I will handle questions in relation to DIPE capital works. Questions in regard to the capital works programs of other agencies need to be directed to the appropriate minister. I will handle any questions that committee members may have in regard to any contractual issues for any capital works programs that are administered by the Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Environment.

As outlined by the Treasurer, the development of accrual accounting methodology in this year's budget has resulted in the DCIS corporate support costs of services being distributed to agencies. This provides for a more complete picture of the costs to deliver services, and enhances the comparability of the budget with other jurisdictions. Agency operating expenses and operating revenue both increased with no nett effect on the operating result in a statement of financial performance.

Questions in regard to the Office of Environment and Heritage will be handled by the minister for the environment. There maybe some issues of a departmental corporate nature that relate to both my portfolio and those of the minister for the environment. I will provide relevant information where appropriate.

The expenditure on the record capital works programs delivered by this government is predominantly well in excess of 95% being delivered by Territory companies, so that is certainly a proud record of this government - 95% Territory companies. This provides private sector employment opportunities throughout the Territory from design to construction. The department is well placed to deliver jobs and great lifestyle - two of the main cornerstones of this year's budget.

Mr Chairman, in conclusion, I look forward to any questions the committee may have in regard to the appropriation for this year.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** Thank you, minister. The time is now 8.35 am and, for the Hansard record, I wish to advise that pursuant to section 12 of the terms of reference of the Estimates Committee, Madam Speaker has nominated the member for Daly to replace the member for Drysdale and, further, the member for Barkly to replace the member for Millner.

The committee will now proceed to consider the estimates and proposed expenditure contained in Appropriation Bill 2004-05 as they relate to lands and planning.

**OUTPUT GROUP 1.0 – Land Planning, Development and Management**  
**Output 1.1 – Land Information Infrastructure**

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** I now call for questions on Output Group 1.0, Land Planning, Development and Management, Output 1.1, Land Information Infrastructure. Shadow minister.

**Mr BURKE:** Thank you, Mr Chairman. I welcome you, minister, and join with you in congratulating Mr Chambers for a superb career in the public service, and assisting the CLP government over many years. The hallmark of a professional public servant is clearly demonstrated in your performance over many years, and we thank you for that. We wish you all the very best in your retirement and we certainly hope that, with only a week to go, you feel absolutely free to speak on a whole range of issues without fear or favour.

**Mr CHAMBERS:** As free as I did previously.

**Mr BURKE:** I wonder, with the minister's concurrence, if we could deal with a few general issues first. I know we are in a particular output group, but it is very hard to talk about a large multifunctional department until I get some feeling as to just how the department operates on a day-to-day basis. Are you happy with that?

**Dr BURNS:** Any questions that are relevant to the budget are certainly relevant, so let us press on.

**Mr BURKE:** Could I ask you, first, about the questions that I gave you on notice. How do you intend to deal with them? Do you want to table them now?

**Dr BURNS:** I thought we would go through output by output area and we can work it in. There are some questions that require some clarification and, as you are aware, member for Brennan, standing orders say that, really, it is all by verbal questioning within this committee. So, let us press forward output by output area.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** I will just make the point, shadow, that we have gone over this ground before. It is not in the terms of reference for the Estimates Committee to accept questions on notice.

**Mr BURKE:** Yes, I know what the rules are. I am simply saying one of the questions is: can you give me the capital works program and revised capital works program for 2003-04? You have to send that across to me; I have to look at it; and I have to ask you questions on that output. It is very hard to interrogate that sitting here without that sort of information in advance. They are the practical difficulties of trying to interrogate some of these areas. That is why I have asked. In that area, you might wish to hand over that documentation so we can have a look at it in advance.

**Dr BURNS:** There are figures published in the budget, member for Brennan. If you want to discuss capital works programs *per se* that are within the ambit of the DIPE, I am quite prepared to deal with it, once we get through all these output areas, as a separate issue before we go on to GBDs. I am prepared down to output area 6. Once we dispense with those and before we go on to GBDs, I am more than willing to discuss capital works projects as a bundle. Otherwise, you can discuss relevant ones as we move through the output areas.

**Mr BURKE:** Can I ask at the outset, with regards to the capital works program for 2003-04 and the revised capital works program, the minor new works program for 2003-04 and the revised minor new works program: do you have that information? Are you going to table it so I know in advance?

**Dr BURNS:** As I say, I am prepared to deal with that issue after we have gone through output areas 1 to 6.

**Mr BURKE:** I think the answer is no. It is not very helpful, but, anyway, I will not labour it any longer. Can you tell me how you ...

**Dr BURNS:** These output areas relate to Budget Paper No 3. I am more than willing to ...

**Mr BURKE:** Yes, I am not talking about that. All I want is a sheet of paper so that I can have a look at it and, when we get to that output area, I will have a chance ...

**Dr BURNS:** I am more than willing to go onto Budget Paper No 4 after we have dealt with Budget Paper No 3. So, let us get into Budget Paper No 3 output by output.

**Mr BURKE:** Minister, can you give me an overview of your department - how it is structured and how it works on a day-to-day basis in relation to you?

**Dr BURNS:** Well, once again, member for Brennan, I thought we were moving through these things output by output area, hence I have given an introductory statement. That is a question of a general nature that I am prepared to take before we move into output by output area ...

**Mr Burke:** That is what I am saying, so I get an understanding of the department.

**Dr BURNS:** I believe I have a very close working relationship with the department. I have been minister since December. I hold very regular meetings with my CEO and the executive every week. Any issues that may come up to me in briefs - and I know the member for Daly has had this portfolio before and appreciates the volume of briefs and other matters that come up to the minister. Any questions I have, I request verbal briefings.

I have undertaken a program of visitation to the workplace to meet more people who are involved in this department. It is a very large department; it has several executive areas. Mr Chambers might talk about the organisational structure.

**Mr CHAMBERS:** Thank you, minister. Barry Chambers ...

**Mr Burke:** I am interested in the structure and how the ...

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** No, you have asked a question. It is common courtesy to allow the minister to fully respond and, then, if you have any supplementary questions.

**Mr BURKE:** I am trying to be helpful, Mr Chairman, because I am not really interested in how the minister has visited people from day to day. I am interested in how the departmental areas relate to each other; how the central corporate area relates to those output areas.

**Dr BURNS:** I have asked Mr Chambers to do that, and we will give him the courtesy for talking about the executive structure and the departmental structure.

**Mr CHAMBERS:** Thank you, minister. The department, as you know, is an amalgamation of three agencies. It was the former Transport and Works; Lands, Planning and Environment; and Parks and Wildlife Commission. When we established it, the major effort was in how we build it together as a single agency and develop the strength of coordination across all of the elements.

As the minister pointed out earlier, early in the piece we adopted the theme of balancing development and conservation because, for some of the staff there was an apparent contradiction about having environment and conservation people in with people who were focussed on infrastructure development. So, we have put a lot of effort in over the past two or three years to develop that understanding and the linkages between people to ensure that all of those matters that relate to both conservation and development get a fair hearing within the agency, and are reflected in the advice provided to the government.

To establish that, we effectively formed a number of major groups within the department. The first one was - and these are in no particular order - the Office of Environment and Heritage, which had been pretty much as it was in the former LPE. It was established and that functions fairly independently within the agency, because we wanted to ensure that the advice it provided to the Minister for Environment and Heritage was not in conflict with other parts of the department. As an example, the department is the proponent for the EIS for both Glyde Point and the city waterfront development, but the Office of Environment and Heritage is responsible for assessing those developments. Therefore, it was important to maintain, in a corporate governance sense, the differences between independence and sitting within the broader agency.

The Transport and Infrastructure group picked up a lot of what the former Transport and Works did. It was, essentially, the former Transport and Works, but with some minor modifications in internal structuring within that to bring together the road element to form almost a road authority within the agency. The other side is, we have the infrastructure development and building side of it, if you like, and that is the group that works very largely for the other agencies to deliver the capital works program. Therefore, the fundamental difference is that roads is an internal client, and most of the other work is done for external clients, although DIPE as itself has some building projects.

That sits in the Transport and Infrastructure group, as does the construction division, which functions as a GBD. I guess that just adds a layer of difficulty in consideration, because the construction division here features as a GBD. However, it is integral in terms of delivering the capital works program. A number of the figures we have, when you look at the agency, are really grouped together with all of the GBDs because, in the management sense, we operate as a collective.

We have a conservation and natural resources group, which picked up the former Parks and Wildlife Commission. Added to it were the natural resource management parts of the former Lands, Planning and Environment Department. So, within that group we have all the soil, water, biodiversity scientists, the natural resource management people that deliver programs as the diverse land care, the wildlife management operations - the crop chasers if you like and, of course, parks management. That is a very diverse group of some 500 or 600 people, as is the transport and infrastructure group.

We also have a lands group, which consists of the larger elements of the former Lands, Planning and Environment Department. That includes land administration, land information, planning - both management for the Development Consent Authority and strategic planning. It also includes the

Building Advisory Services group. Also, over the last year or two, we incorporated into that group the Electrical Safety Unit, as the regulator of building. All of that has come together so plumbing, draining, electrical works are all administered - the regulatory side of that - within the lands group.

**Mr BURKE:** How do you bring those competing cultures together and, at the same time, reserve their competitive nature regarding environmental interest and protection versus development within the one department ...

**Ms LAWRIE:** Point of order!

**Dr BURNS:** You should address that through me, member for Brennan. But let us just move on, we are near the end. We have not mentioned Mr Baskerville yet, and the regions so, if you want to talk about that, Barry.

**Mr CHAMBERS:** John Baskerville represents us in the regions, because we have quite a large office in Alice Springs, and substantial numbers in Katherine, Tennant Creek and Nhulunbuy. So, we do try and bring in the regions as well. We also, to tie all that together, have a Strategic and Business Services Division, which I refer to as the glue that holds the organisation together. That is not an output, but the costs of that are allocated by output, and you will find that in output groups, and individual outputs. The cost, if you like, of the overheads of the agency are all built into the outputs, and properly reflected. That, of course, is where the DCIS charges go. They are reflected in those output numbers.

To make it all work, we have an Executive Management Board - there is eight of us. We meet on a monthly basis. We tend not to look at detailed issues; more the focus is on how we integrate the activities and achieve that balance. Those discussions that we have is where we find the nub of the resolution of issues, where there is any apparent conflict.

**Dr BURNS:** To answer your question about - I think you used the word tensions. It is probably not a word that I would use. However, between the various parts in the departmental structure, there is no doubt there may be perceptions of competing interests in terms of that balance between conservation and development, and that is the credo of the department. Through the daily reference group, we are constantly revaluating the resource and development side, and the proponent versus the protector. I am bearing those issues in mind and, strategically, we will move to develop better systems in that regard.

**Mr BURKE:** If we were looking at the corporate management group of the department, does that include what you would call Strategic and Business Services Division?

**Dr BURNS:** Of course, it does, that is an integral part, as Barry said, of the department. I suppose the other part that you will be talking to minister Scrymgeour about is the Office of Environment and Heritage. That is another part of the overall department.

**Mr BURKE:** In terms of the chief executive officer and his immediate executive group, that would include who?

**Mr CHAMBERS:** The organisation operates almost a bit like a federation. We have a relatively small core. I have a personal assistant and that is my staff. Adjacent to me within that group, we have a secretariat that provides the service and the connection between the minister's office and the agency, and that includes for both ministers that I am accountable to. We have a central marketing media management group, and a central legal service group. They all function as entities, but the executive directors of those larger groups have a personal assistant. We are not top heavy with a whole lot of separate secretariats and marketing groups, because that was part of the rationalisation. It was how we achieved both the integration and being able to live within the resources we were given.

**Dr BURNS:** Member for Brennan, if I could place on the record, too, my thanks to Mr Chambers as

CEO. Obviously, this was a major job to actually produce an amalgamation of this department, and he has done an excellent job. He would not say that the process is finished; it is a developing process. However, he has really nailed it down very well, and I commend him for that; he has done an excellent job.

**Mr BURKE:** You said the Strategic and Business Services Division's cost are amortised across the other output areas?

**Mr CHAMBERS:** Yes. They are simple distributed through the accounting system against each output, and that is identified in the ledger structures as corporate overheads, as are the DCIS notional charges, so that each output actually has that element within it.

**Dr BURNS:** Possibly Mr Tinkham might want to respond to this in terms of accrual accounting.

**Mr Burke:** The question basically ...

**Dr BURNS:** No, no. I have asked Mr Tinkham to respond. Could you respond please, Mr Tinkham?

**Mr Burke:** It would be nice if he knew the question.

**Dr BURNS:** You have raised an issue of spreading costs or amortising costs across an organisation. I am calling on Mr Tinkham, the financial officer, to speak further on it.

**Mr TINKHAM:** Ken Tinkham. Really, the distribution of overheads is part of the Working for Outcomes model as a whole, in that we need to reflect what the outputs of the departments are and what they will cost. Strategic and Business Services provides services to all of the output groups right across the department, depending on their needs, of course. We distribute costs largely based on a very simple method of the number of staff, but also depending on the area relating to direct costs that we incur on behalf of the various output groups.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** Shadow minister, I am assuming that this line of question is so that you can properly identify areas where you might ask questions in regard to outputs. It does appear to me, however, that you are asking non-output specific budget questions. I remind you that we on Output 1.1, Land Information Infrastructure. It is now 8.54 am ...

**Mr BURKE:** I am seeking the indulgence of the minister because that output area is a very finite output area. Before you go into that output area, you need to know how the department as a whole functions, and the relationship of the corporate executive area to the rest. That is what I am interested in.

**Dr BURNS:** Member for Brennan, I offered you a full briefing, which you took, on the department and its operation. You are very well aware of the answer to the questions that you are asking.

**Mr BURKE:** No, I am not.

**Dr BURNS:** You should be.

**Mr BURKE:** In terms of who is servicing who, what would be the cost of that Strategic and Business Services Division and your own executive group as a relationship to the department as a whole?

**Dr BURNS:** If you could direct your questions through me, member for Brennan, I will ask Mr Tinkham to ...

**Mr BURKE:** There is nothing in the budget papers that says what your costs for the executive group are. I am trying to establish that.

**Dr BURNS:** Yes, either yourself or Mr Tinkham.

**Mr CHAMBERS:** Thank you, minister. Within the total budget of the group, including the department and the GBDs, which is some \$460m-odd, the corporate overheads come to about \$27m. If you want a break-up of that ...

**Mr Burke:** As a proportion of total budget?

**Mr CHAMBERS:** Yes, that is part of the total budget. It is not reflected as a single output, as I said. However; as an example, within the corporate overheads - and these are the things you amalgamate and then distribute - is Information and Business Systems which includes our records unit, library, dealing with information requests, mainframe charges and applications. As a total agency or the group of agencies, that is some \$7m.

The Financial Services Group, in order to deal with the myriad requirements of financial accountability within the public sector, requires a substantial number of people to monitor that and deal with the endless number of requests for financial information. That costs some \$2.5m per year.

Legal Services: we had in the three agencies various people who were dealing with quasi-legal matters - people ranging from those who prosecute truckies for breaches through to people dealing with claims in Parks and Wildlife. We amalgamated that as a unit so we could actually get a handle on the costs and manage it more effectively. That unit costs something like \$600 000 a year.

Marketing and communications is a similar amount of about \$0.9m a year, and that includes all of the internal and external costs of managing literally hundreds and hundreds of requests from the media for information - everything from being reactive to being proactive. It includes the show circuit and things like that.

People and Learning we call the group, not HR. This is about the management of 1380 people within the total agency, and that has required an enormous amount of effort. I point out that in the amalgamation process, through all of that over two-and-a-half years, we only had two grievances lodged with the Commissioner for Public Employment. That stands as a great testament to the management team and, indeed, to the people in our People and Learning Group. There were, to be frank, some tensions in the early days. However, by talking to people, working that through, we managed that very effectively.

We continue to provide support to people. We look at succession planning in the agency. It is no secret that we have an ageing public sector consisting of a lot of people like myself who are moving into their 50s, and some, indeed, in their early 60s. We are moving through to help people manage succession and make sure people are brought up through the system to continue the work. We have mentoring programs, succession management programs and other management training.

We have a small secretariat that costs \$600 000 a year to run; the DCIS notational charges, as shown in the budget papers at \$10.7m; and the cost of the executive group - both myself, associated staff and the regional directors who float across all the divisions - comes to about another \$2m.

**Mr BURKE:** If the minister received a query from someone in the public complaining about road maintenance or verge contracting, how does that query bounce through your department to get it answered?

**Dr BURNS:** Obviously, it depends where the person lodges that inquiry.

**Mr Burke:** To you.

**Dr BURNS:** If it is something through my ministerial office, there are people in my ministerial office who have broad responsibilities across those portfolio areas within the department, and there is a relationship. The query is referred to the department and we get a response, depending on the urgency and the nature of it. We always respond to queries; that has been my motto: we acknowledge. Some queries take a little longer than others, and I will always send an interim letter to people. I nearly always send an interim letter to people to let them know that it is a complex issue and may take a longer time.

There is a system; it works very well. I am someone who looks at dates, particularly on letters that I sign to people. There are a few queries that might take six weeks, or sometimes more, but the majority of things are turned around within a month.

**Mr BURKE:** Yes. I want to know what the process is within the department.

**Dr BURNS:** I will defer to Mr Chambers.

**Mr BURKE:** No, I will just explain the question. Notwithstanding Mr Chambers' wide experience and your wide experience - new minister, new staff, next week new CEO, no expert on DIPE - any of those functional areas, if queries come through the minister, how do they ...

**Dr Burns:** I beg your pardon?

**Mr BURKE:** The CEO does not have the experience. The CEO who is coming in to DIPE is not experienced in terms of the functional ...

**Dr Burns:** That is a value judgment that you are making.

**Mr BURKE:** No, the functional areas of DIPE. He might be a great manager.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** Shadow minister, we should stay arise from criticising any public servants.

**Mr BURKE:** I was not criticising.

**Dr BURNS:** It was a criticism.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** People are appointed to positions on merit and for ...

**Mr BALDWIN:** Okay, make your point ...

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** We will not tolerate ...

**Mr BALDWIN:** It was not a criticism. You have made the point, but it not a criticism.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** Well, let us stay away from that, please.

**Ms LAWRIE:** A point of order, Mr Chairman! We are now going in to the internal communication structure of the department. We need to be on output 1.1. When are we actually going to proceed with the process that this committee has established and has carried through for the entire estimates sitting?

**Dr BURNS:** I am ready for Output 1.1.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** Member for Karama, I am well aware that it is 9.03 am, and we have got nowhere near Output 1.1, where I had hoped that we would be. We have had criticism from opposition all



through this process that four-and-a-half hours is not long enough. I believe we are seeing here exactly why four-and-a-half hours is not long enough.

**Mr BURKE:** Well, if you would stop interrupting we might be able to get on.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** If the shadow minister could address Output 1.1, I am sure we would be all a lot better for it.

**Dr BURNS:** How about if Mr Chambers rounds off this response and we move to output 1.1?

**Mr BURKE:** I want to know who is tugging whose chain. Is your corporate governance area, your corporate management group ...

**Dr Burns:** There is no need to be crude, member for Brennan.

**Mr BURKE:** ... servicing your output areas? You seem to have a very large group of people who are servicing the central corporate management objectives, rather than servicing the output areas themselves in terms of how they get their normal day-to-day administrative support.

**Mr CHAMERS:** Thank you, minister. Maybe you might have misunderstood just what the Corporate Services Group does. They function there to focus purely to service the output groups and the outputs, and the people who are managing them. We could have dispersed all of those people directly, so that each output group had its own legal unit, finance unit, and personnel unit, but that would be grossly inefficient in an agency this size. The people in there function very much as internal consultants to help the line managers do the job and live with all the corporate requirements, and the corporate governance requirements, that are imposed on a public sector agency by the myriad bits of legislation, Treasury Directions, rules, etcetera.

Any information, any contact with the department, is primarily through the people who manage the output groups. Queries that come in about the state of, say, a park or a road, go pretty much directly to the people who are managing the parks and the roads. It is only when something elevates to a much higher level that central media contact becomes essential to coordinate because, quite often the nature of the business we are in does involve a number of elements of the agency. We do not want to look like the left arm does not know what the right arm is doing and, therefore, we do try and coordinate any responses, either to the minister or to the media.

Every day, we probably get hundreds and hundreds of queries, but they do not come to the chief executive officer, I can tell you, because, God, I would be there until midnight every night just dealing with hundreds of queries, which might be important to individuals but, in the bigger scheme of things, are not the job of the chief executive. So, the chief executive's office can be small, and focus on the strategic direction of the agency and provide that coordinating guidance that is needed and, indeed, to interpret the minister's requirements for implementing government policy and ensuring that, through our management structure, that is widely understood within the department. We put a major effort into communicating within the department so everybody understands where we are heading.

**Mr BURKE:** So, on top of all of that support, how much did you spend on consultants in 2003-04?

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** Member, minister, it is time we got to Output 1.1. I do not mind you asking that question ...

**Mr BURKE:** Where do I ask that one?

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** Well, you find out.

**Ms LAWRIE:** Non-output specific budget questions, like everyone else.

**Mr BURKE:** But they do not have consultants in the corporate central management group.

**Ms LAWRIE:** Non-output specific budget questions.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** I would like ...

**Mr BURKE:** That are not in an output area. You told you me that.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** Minister, I would ask you to concentrate on Output 1.1.

**Dr BURNS:** I believe DCIS has given the member for Greateorex a complete list of consultancies, so that question has already been asked in previous sessions. Once we get past Budget Paper No 3, I am happy to dip into Budget Paper No 4. The capital works are in Budget Paper No 4, so let us start moving through Budget Paper No 3.

**Mr BURKE:** How much did you spend on this? How much is your in-house legal capacity?

**Ms LAWRIE:** Point of order!

**Dr BURNS:** Mr Chambers ... I decline to answer that question. I want to get onto the budget area, Output 1.1 which is ...

**Mr Burke:** It is a budget area. What is your in-house legal capacity?

**Ms LAWRIE:** Point of order!

**Dr BURNS:** ... Land Information Infrastructure.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** Minister, member for Karama has a point of order.

**Ms LAWRIE:** The question asked about the cost of lawyers in the department is clearly able to be dealt with in non-output specific budget questions which, if the member for Brennan had bothered to look at the output groups as identified by the Estimates Committee and agreed to by both the opposition and government members of the Estimates Committee, we have a process for this. The process enables us to move forward as a committee, so non-output specific budget questions is where you will get your catch-all general answers.

**Mr BURKE:** Well, thank you for that advice.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** Member for Karama, I do not think it is a point of order, but it is a very good point that you have made, nevertheless. Shadow minister, if you could please, in the hopefulness of being efficient and getting some good answers for the public who want to know what is happening in this important portfolio, concentrate on the outputs.

**Mr BURKE:** Thank you, Mr Chairman, I know exactly where I am going. In 2003-04, you said you maintained 17 corporate datasets but, on your own figures, only 23.5% of those datasets were maintained to target specifications. Can you explain why?

**Dr BURNS:** This is in ...

**Mr BURKE:** I thought you would be poised and ready. You have been waiting for me to get here for the last half an hour, you reckon, and now you are going to look up your books.

**Dr BURNS:** Mr Stephens.

**Mr STEVENS:** Vic Stephens. Regarding the 17 corporate datasets, the percentage maintained to target specifications is a quality performance indicator. The standards that we are targeting are, basically, national and international standards which are still being developed and, as they become available, we move the datasets to comply with those standards.

**Mr BURKE:** Is that an outcome that you are comfortable with – 23.5% - or is that something that you are struggling with?

**Mr STEPHENS:** No, at the moment we are quite comfortable with it because, as those standards are developed and approved, we will migrate the datasets to that standard.

**Mr BURKE:** Yes. That is all.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** Do any other members of the committee have any further questions in regard to output 1.1? Moving right along, that concludes consideration of output 1.1.

#### **Output 1.2 – Land Use Planning and Regulation**

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** The committee will now consider output 1.2, Land Use Planning and Regulation. Shadow minister?

**Mr BURKE:** Minister, can you tell me what your in-house planning capacity is? I say that in the context of in the past, where we had people like Graham Bailey assisted by notable individuals like Hans Voss - planners with reputation, experience, competence and a high regard. They are gone. What is your in-house planning capacity now?

**Dr BURNS:** Mr Chambers will take that question.

**Mr CHAMBERS:** Thank you, Minister. You raised a couple of individuals there, but one of them never worked in the public sector. Hans was never an in-house employee of the LPE or DIPE. However, Graham Bailey has himself made, as you know - and we all understand Graham's contribution to planning. However, if you focus on one individual it is actually to the detriment of many other staff we have. We do not just depend on single individuals, so while Graham is actually on long service leave pending retirement, we have in the agency a number of very experienced planners who deal with the planning issues of the day. As people leave, we recruit; so our in-house capacity has been maintained largely. I would have to say, though, that planners is a hard to recruit category and we are continually seeking to develop the planners we have.

We have younger planners. We have a graduate training scheme where we move people around through Environment and Heritage, Natural Resource Management and the Planning Division to ensure we have young planners with a broad feel for the issues they need to deal with in development. Whilst you can look at our in-house capacity - and it varies week-to-week, month-to-month depending on recruitment - we still have a substantial capacity. Again, I go back to the point which was raised in the media some time ago - and I guess following your early comment about free and frank expression - it is quite to the detriment of the reputation of all of those who continue to work in the department at a high professional level to think that, just because some well-known and long-serving identities have left that, somehow, we are bereft of talent. I am always amazed at the young people coming through who have enormous talent. Our job is to develop them and ensure that they can continue to serve the Territory in the future. I am quite comfortable with our capacity.

However, where we have specialist needs that we cannot manage internally, we do engage consultants, and that goes right across the board in many areas and many outputs of the department.

**Mr BURKE:** The budget for 2003-04 shows a reduction in allocation in the output area of \$81 000 to

\$4.9m, from 2002-03 estimates, yet the budget was increased over the year to \$5.5m. Can you give me reasons for that?

**Dr BURNS:** Yes, once again, the DCIS notional overhead charges of \$511 000; there was an increase in corporate overheads of \$83 000; transfer of electricity costs from corporate overheads to relevant outputs in 2003-04 of \$7000, and then were some reductions in funding from 2003-04 for transfer of staff to Land Development, and also depreciation. That is where the changes come from, member for Brennan.

**Mr BURKE:** How do judge stakeholders satisfaction of 90% consistently across budget?

**Mr CHAMBERS:** Perhaps I could give a general introduction to that because, where we have indicated these satisfaction things in our outputs, we have made a judgment of where we are. However, to follow that through, we undertake a number of surveys of client interviews, done by external agents, not the people themselves who might lead the questioning. We try to evaluate that on a regular basis, but I do not think we have evaluated every single output, every year, because that would be quite expensive. In 2003-04, we undertook a sampling of evaluations across all of the outputs. In relation to this specific one, I would have to refer to Chris Bigg, who is the executive director in charge of that area.

**Mr BIGG:** Thanks, minister. We recently conducted that survey. The target was 90%, the actual result was 88% - customers satisfaction by survey.

**Mr BURKE:** What do you mean by that?

**Mr BIGG:** We conducted a survey of the stakeholders.

**Mr BURKE:** Your target was 90%.

**Mr BIGG:** The target was 90%; the actual result of the survey was 88%.

**Dr BURNS:** Well, that is pretty good.

**Mr BURKE:** Subjective? Externally audited? Who did it for you?

**Mr BIGG:** We had a consultant, Gail Humble. So, it is external and independent, otherwise there is not much point in conducting them.

**Mr BURKE:** Okay. Prior to last election, Labor committed to change the *Planning Act* claiming, amongst other things, stakeholders dissatisfaction with the act. This is the third full budget, minister. Has your government changed the existing 1999 act in any way?

**Dr BURNS:** There are amendments coming through to the *Planning Act* as we speak, and then the NT Planning Scheme will be reviewed. There has been quite a lot of consultation in the community, in terms of the *Planning Act*. Did you want to expand on that at all?

**Mr BURKE:** We were told all that last year. I would like to know where it is.

**Dr BURNS:** Mr Bigg will give you a report on progress. If you would, please, Mr Bigg.

**Mr BIGG:** Thanks, minister. The objective is to have a draft of the *Planning Act* amendments into the Assembly late this year. As you would imagine, the *Planning Act* has to be dealt with - that is the framework - and then the amendments to the Planning Scheme have to follow. So in terms of the timetable, the *Planning Act* should be into the Assembly later this year.

**Mr BURKE:** And Labor will fulfil its promise of achieving limited third party appeal, increasing the role of local government, and improving the consultation and notification to the community - Labor promises prior to the election?

**Dr BURNS:** That is our intention, member for Brennan. As I outlined in the last session of the Assembly, we are very proud of meeting a whole raft of election commitments and, if given the opportunity today, I will certainly outline some more.

**Mr BURKE:** Minister Toyne said yesterday, opposition is quite different to being in government. Tell me what you are going to achieve with limited third party appeal.

**Dr BURNS:** As the Chief Minister said, one day in government beats a whole term in opposition, member for Brennan, as you well know.

**Mr BURKE:** I agree with that.

**Dr BURNS:** Anyway, we will deliver on that promise.

**Mr BURKE:** What will you do in terms of limited third party appeal? What do you intend to deliver?

**Dr BURNS:** You know the process. This is a Cabinet process. We will honour our election commitment. The detail behind it will be decided by Cabinet. Cabinet is right behind our election promises and there will be a Cabinet submission coming up. There has been quite extensive consultation and I will be meeting with some of the groups myself who were consulted during the process. I want to make sure that everything is A-okay and on target.

**Mr BURKE:** So when will the public know?

**Dr BURNS:** The public is already, there is - Mr Bigg, could you just detail the public consultation process that has gone on to date?

**Mr BURKE:** No, when will the public get a new act?

**Dr BURNS:** No, hold on, member for Brennan. I have asked Mr Bigg to outline the nature and breadth of the public consultations.

**Mr BURKE:** No, well I do not want to hear that! You have been consulting for three years. I want to know when the act ...

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** No, no, shadow.

**Mr BURKE:** I am asking the questions.

**Dr BURNS:** That was the question that you asked: when will the public know?

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** Hang on, hang on.

**Mr BURKE:** No, I want to know when the act will be delivered to the public.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** Minister, just hold it there for a moment. That is right, shadow minister, and if you noticed, I am letting you have quite wide-ranging questions here; you are asking the questions. I would request, however, that you have the courtesy to allow the minister to respond. You have asked a question; let him respond to it.

**Mr BURKE:** I do not want to hear about the consultation.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** It does not matter what you want to hear. You asked the question ...

**Mr BURKE:** Oh, okay! So it does not matter what question I ask or what I want to hear. I just sit here, do I?

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** No, frame your questions – you asked the question.

**Dr BURNS:** No, no. This is an interrogative process, member for Brennan.

**Mr BURKE:** I feel like I am being interrogated!

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** Perhaps you should frame them more clearly.

**Dr BURNS:** You can frame it again after Mr Bigg has given some breadth to the public consultation. It should be on the record. You have asked why it has taken so long, this is why.

**Mr BIGG:** There was a discussion paper released in March last year. There has been extensive consultation that has continued for most of 2003 and culminated in some workshops with the planning action groups. There will be even further consultation with the Planning Scheme because it has not been exhibited in a statutory sense. There has been extensive consultation with a wide range of interested groups, the general community and those who have specific interests.

**Dr BURNS:** As Mr Bigg foreshadowed earlier, we have a target of introduction into the Assembly later on this year; hopefully, in October.

**Mr BURKE:** So, if you were the Mayor of Palmerston, what would you be expecting as a result of your wide consultation because of the increased role of local government under this new *Planning Act*?

**Ms Lawrie:** What a bizarre question. He is not the Mayor of Palmerston; he is the minister.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** I do not think we should go into hypotheticals of that nature, shadow minister. Quite clearly, they are not the Mayor of Palmerston.

**Dr BURNS:** I am prepared to take it, but it is a pretty abstract question.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** Very gracious, minister.

**Mr BURKE:** You said you consulted. I am saying you have obviously heard what they want. What I asked you was: what are you going to deliver?

**Dr BURNS:** As you know only too well, Cabinet makes decisions on the basis of the options that are put to it. In something so diverse as amendments to the *Planning Act*, there is going to be a range of different sets and points of view on this. It is Cabinet's job to actually make decisions on all of the options that are put before it. That is our job. You know that.

**Mr BURKE:** Can you tell me what your point of view is?

**Dr BURNS:** My point of view?

**Mr BURKE:** On limited third party appeal?

**Dr BURNS:** I stand behind our election commitments, member for Brennan.

**Mr BURKE:** Good. I will check them. Minister, explain how the Planning Scheme works.

**Dr BURNS:** How the Planning Scheme works? Well, it would take a long time. It is a very complex issue. I have to confess that it has taken a lot of study on my part to start to get across the Planning Scheme and its intricacies. I certainly sign off, as the member for Daly would know, on a lot of instruments related to the Northern Territory Planning Scheme. Where I have questions or doubts, I ask for advice from the department. It has become apparent to me that, in many ways, the *Planning Act* has become outdated to some degree and, basically, needs a revamp. That is what this government is doing. I hope that answers your question.

**Mr BURKE:** If you carried on in that way, we would be here all day hearing about it. You placed an interim control order over all R3 development when it abuts R1.

**Dr BURNS:** Yes.

**Mr BURKE:** Are the residents of Coconut Grove satisfied with the result?

**Dr BURNS:** Well, member for Brennan, I gave that particular ICDO a lot of thought. I received a lot of advice. I discussed the various options with a lot of people. I am satisfied that it was the right thing to do in the circumstances. I do not think that you would find any agreement - or very little agreement - out in the community about four-storey buildings in an R3 zone, or potentially four-storey buildings butting up to R1 where it is ordinary residential. It certainly caused a lot of angst and feeling, I suppose, out in the community. Since I brought in that ICDO in relation to R3 butting up to R1, I have received nothing but positive comments from the public and a number of developers. I know it will not make everybody happy, but that is what I have done. Development to four-storeys in an R3 zone is, of course, by consent. I have placed a limit of three-storeys with some other elements to that ICDO, and I am satisfied that it was the right thing to do.

**Mr BURKE:** Have you been approached by any developer for compensation as a result of these ICDOs?

**Dr BURNS:** I have met with the developer of that particular block, and his wife, and they certainly put that case to me. However, my very strong legal advice was that there was no case for legal compensation. As I say again, basically, it is not a right for anyone to develop to four storeys on an R3 block; it is always by consent. So those who say that, somehow, I have stripped them of a legal right, need to go and talk to a good lawyer.

**Mr BURKE:** Well, okay, I guess that is what they are going to have to do. Minister, it was recently reported in the paper that aviation restrictions could limit the height of a 33-storey development that is currently before the DCA.

**Dr BURNS:** Yes.

**Mr BURKE:** Is DCA's authority overridden here, or is there a conflict with the Central Darwin Planning Scheme and Defence aviation needs?

**Dr BURNS:** Well, being a military man, member for Brennan, you know that there are controls in aviation. It is a military air base out there. Darwin has a proud aviation history in war time, and in peace, and the Defence Department informed us of height restrictions applicable there. I will ask Mr Bigg to elaborate further.

**Mr BIGG:** Thank you, minister. The height restriction in the CBD, as per the Land Use Objectives and

the Central Darwin planning concepts, were 120 m AHD. We understand that Defence are reviewing that height. We also understand that they are likely to advise us that that height will be reduced to 106.6 m AHD, which would not allow a 33-storey building.

**Mr BURKE:** Whose authority overrides who? Do the Defence requirements override your Central Darwin Planning Scheme?

**Dr BURNS:** Well, obviously, member for Brennan, to some degree this would be a legal issue. I know Mr Bigg is not a lawyer, but he might care to give you a bit of an indication of what advice has been forthcoming so far.

**Mr BIGG:** It is a matter of the two regulatory regimes actually working together. The 106.6 m, which we understand will be formally advised by Defence very shortly is, obviously, a safety issue related to air safety. You understand, as anyone who lives in the area does, that the CBD is within the circuit area of Darwin airport for both runways but, in particular, the main runway 1129, and Defence have always advised the air safety height for the CBD.

**Mr BURKE:** So where does that leave the 33-storey building?

**Dr BURNS:** Well, I believe the DCA have been given an instruction, based on that, not to hear that particular thing. Do you want to comment further on that?

**Mr BIGG:** The DCA was given a general direction not to determine any application that was inconsistent with the height review by Defence.

**Mr BURKE:** So who gave that direction?

**Dr BURNS:** Well, I did.

**Mr BURKE:** You did, minister?

**Dr BURNS:** Yes.

**Mr BIGG:** But it was a general direction for any application in the CBD area.

**Mr BURKE:** Given those new parameters, what will be the maximum height which that development could go to?

**Dr BURNS:** Well, my understanding is that it will be about 25 storeys. Is that correct?

**Mr BIGG:** At 27 storeys.

**Dr BURNS:** 27 storeys.

**Mr BIGG:** The 33-storey application already projected through the height guideline that was there of 120 m, so it was already through that.

**Mr BURKE:** Seeing that we are talking about Defence, what are the Defence issues with regards to the waterfront that have been raised – similar planning issues?

**Dr BURNS:** I believe the waterfront is in a different output. I will discuss with Mr Chambers.

**Mr BURKE:** It is all planning.



**Mr CHAMBERS:** Thank you, minister. Since the development of the waterfront has been mooted and, in fact for many years before, there has been a lot of discussions with Defence through the port authority and the other agencies that have an interest in that area. I guess, over a period of time, Defence's requirements have evolved. Particularly in recent years, there has been an increasing number of visits by Navy vessels and, laid on top of that, of course, we have increasing focus on security requirements. There has been a lot of discussion going on with Defence about just how they would use the port. Some of those questions might be better directed under the Darwin Port Corporation output because the chief executive has had much more detailed discussions.

From a planning view point and in developing the waterfront, we have remained highly conscience of Defence needs, particularly as it relates to refuelling ships. It gets more complex in a sense, due to the relocation of the industry fuel terminal from the Frances Bay area over to East Arm which is now under way. It has raised a whole lot of issues about the future the Navy fuel installation. Those discussions have been ongoing with Defence at a very high level. They have, essentially, been led by the project team that is based within the Department of the Chief Minister and, therefore, I cannot speak in detail about a lot of those discussions as I was not been present at them. I am very conscience of the fact that we have been working very hard with all of the parties, including the proponents for development, about ensuring that Defence's needs are met in a absolute way. However, there are many options which are all being explored.

**Mr BURKE:** Minister, given that the CEO is not privy to some of those discussions as they are held by the project team, what is the involvement of your department in the waterfront development?

**Dr BURNS:** In terms of the EIS, my department has had oversight of that. Did you want to speak some more on that, Mr Bigg?

**Mr BIGG:** Thank you very much, minister. The role of the department in relation to the Darwin city waterfront development was initially to do the very early preliminary work in order to get that project moving. It subsequently transited over to the Department of Chief Minister and the project team that was established there. The department is also the proponent for the EIS of the Darwin city waterfront, and the capital works expenditure for the Darwin city waterfront is also held in this department.

**Mr BURKE:** What is the planning expertise on this project team?

**Mr CHAMBERS:** The project team is not about having people with specific expertise in every single facet of it, because you could have a project team with 20 or 30 people. The departmental representation on that project team was, in fact, Chris Bigg, who was able to draw into those discussions. Where they are needed, the planning expertise and the advice came from other senior departmental officers. It is a very complex project that has many dimensions. The project team itself does not have a full-time town planner on it, but it integrates very closely with the agencies that have the planning expertise. Issues relating to time frames and actions under the *Planning Act* are all obtained by consultation of the department, thus there is a very close working relationship between all of those people that have been established as the planning group or the task force to run the project.

**Mr BURKE:** Yesterday, in questions to the Chief Minister - or the day before, now - her secretary said that when the third proponent was selected, their master plan would go before the public and approval by the DCA. Is that correct?

**Mr CHAMBERS:** Yes, that is correct.

**Mr BURKE:** How will that occur? There will be a master plan coming out and there will be public consultation on this master plan. We have wonderful pretty pictures which are seductive to the public. However, in terms of making sure that all planning issues are properly addressed, that master plan will then go before the DCA and they will have ultimate authority?

**Dr BURNS:** Before I ask Mr Bigg to respond, I would like to say that there are a number of points within this process where there will be public input. Certainly, there has been a period in terms of the EIS and later on, as you say, when the master plan is being developed and a successful proponent has been announced there will be further consultation. Mr Bigg might care to give some details on that.

**Mr BIGG:** Thanks, minister. There are several aspects to what you might think of the master plan and the Planning Scheme and the DCA processes. There is certainly going to be public exhibition and consultation on the draft master plan. There will be elements of that master plan which will be incorporated into the Planning Scheme because, as you know, in the Planning Scheme at the moment is the content of the 1999 Land Use Objectives and Central Darwin Planning Concepts. So there are elements from that master plan, once it has been approved, that will be incorporated into the Planning Scheme. Also, the DCA is the consent authority for each of the individual development applications within the waterfront, so each individual development has to run through the statutory processes of the Development Consent Authority.

**Mr BURKE:** So you will change the Planning Scheme for the central Darwin area to accommodate the master plan?

**Mr BIGG:** Well, elements of that master plan will be incorporated into the Planning Scheme. The Planning Scheme, as you know, is essentially about land use, so the Planning Scheme will not show every element of the master plan. However, those elements of the master plan that need to be incorporated into the Planning Scheme will be.

**Mr BURKE:** How do you see the initial DCA approval occurring? This is a staged development over many years. How is the DCA going to approve it?

**Mr BIGG:** Obviously, the convention centre is an essential element of the early development of the Darwin city waterfront project. There will be a development application for the convention centre. There also will be a development application or applications for any other early work - any other early development - that might be incorporated around the time the convention centre is built. Really there is no difference, as far as the DCA is concerned, between the development application for the Darwin city waterfront and one in Mitchell Street.

**Mr BURKE:** Good. That is what you are confirming. So, each stage of that development, each building of that development in the staged process, will go before the DCA to approve it?

**Dr BURNS:** Yes, and even more than that, member for Brennan, as you well know, the DCA process involves public exhibition and comment. This is the point that has to be made: that all through this development the public will have the right and the expectation that they will comment and be involved in this process, and that is very important.

**Mr BURKE:** Will there be any other approvals required once the master plan is decided; ie an EIS?

**Mr BIGG:** The EIS is developed on a very broad development scenario. Minister?

**Dr BURNS:** There has been a lot of debate about the EIS. Certainly, it is an EIS which provides an environmental impact statement for the broad scope of works that will occur down on that waterfront development - a magnificent development by this government. You can answer that question, Mr Bigg, in your own way.

**Mr BIGG:** Thank you, minister. Obviously, some people have asked: how can you run through an EIS process, which is very comprehensive, without actually having the master plan in front of you? The answer is very simple: the nature of an EIS is about the strategic assessment of the site and the development scenario that was envisaged for the EIS. Incorporated in the EIS is included just about every element that you can think of. It assumes there is going to be dredging within the site, land

reclamation, land filling, and a mixed development incorporating anything that you could in the CBD - residential, commercial, recreational, open space. It assumes that it will continue to operate as a maritime precinct, with Defence and cruise shipping etcetera. The EIS process has incorporated all of those potential elements in it. Whatever the master plan is, it will be able to be incorporated within the development scenario anticipated for the purposes of the EIS.

**Mr BURKE:** It is hard to swallow, though, isn't it? I mean ...

**Dr BURNS:** Can you address that question to me, member for Brennan?

**Mr BURKE:** It is hard to swallow, minister, that ...

**Dr Burns:** Well, it might be hard to swallow for you because it is our development.

**Mr BURKE:** I hope you follow the bouncing ball and put the beach in; then we will be right on track. You are doing well so far. I would have put the convention centre up here, though.

In terms of the EIS, it is hard to swallow when you have already done an EIS on a concept that you know, but a master plan that you have not even decided on. You are going to pick a preferred developer and give them a 10-year staged project to develop that area without any knowledge of what could be the actual densities that end up there.

**Dr BURNS:** Mr Bigg has given a very detailed answer to this. It is a strategic look at the future; it is looking at the broad scope of the works that could go on down there. I am very satisfied with the process, and it is moving along quite well. I am looking forward to the successful proponent being named through a fully audited probity process.

It is a very exciting development for Darwin and the Northern Territory. It will certainly attract a lot of tourists - visitors here in our off-season, which is really what the tourism industry wants. We have our peak in the middle of the year, but this will be a fantastic asset for our tourism industry. It will attract a lot of conventions here, it will fill our hotels at traditionally lean times, and it will give a big boost to retailers in Darwin and the tourism industry generally. I commend this development.

**Mr BURKE:** So you have allowed for a town beach in the EIS?

**Mr BIGG:** The EIS would cover a town beach if there were to be one.

**Dr BURNS:** That is up to the successful proponents, I suppose, whether they have one or not. They might have bungy jumping, I do not know.

**Mr BURKE:** No, we are talking about the EIS. You have done this catch-all EIS that accommodates all situations that could occur there. What I am saying to you is that, if you put in a town beach with all of the associated infrastructure, will the EIS accommodate that? Is that in the EIS? Have those environmental impacts been accommodated in the EIS?

**Dr BURNS:** Can we call Mr Jones forward?

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** Please identify yourself, Mr Jones.

**Mr JONES:** Neville Jones, Executive Director Land Development. Mr Burke, the method or the rationale of carrying out an EIS in this way is several-fold. First of all, any environmental impact statement would include a range of baseline environmental studies. You need to know what the environment is that you are dealing with and how any development would impact on that: the flora and fauna, the marine ecology, all of those sorts of things.

We are dealing with an area here that has, obviously, been developed, redeveloped, and used for a number of different uses over a long period of time. So, the first element of an environmental impact statement is to understand the nature of that environment, much of which has been amended by human activity, not including things such as unexploded ordnance and the use of the fuel depots down there, stockpiling of minerals, all those sorts of things. The first part of the environmental impact statement was to measure the state of that environment to determine the requirements, if any, for soil remediation action plans and all of those elements. All of those elements can be done and discovered, and plans developed, before there is any actual development.

There are some decisions to be made, but I would envisage that, having completed an environmental impact assessment on the state of the environment of the area as it is, certain plans will be put in place to guard against the physical disturbance of the site. The ongoing actions would always be controlled by an environmental management plan. Then, for a successful developer who, for example, was going to build a convention centre, part of the environment management plan that would apply to him would be how, for example, he was going to construct footings and how he would deal against any potential future hydrocarbon contamination that he might encounter. Then, to a large extent, the developer would actually inherit the strategic nature of the environmental assessment.

Even then, further on in the development assessment process for each individual element of the waterfront development, again, in the development assessment process, an organisation like the Office of the Environment and Heritage, would look at that to see if there is any additional environmental impact. I can only speculate here, Mr Burke, that, if a developer comes forward with a proposal, say, of a large development of a marina, the development assessment process would trigger off an additional assessment of that from an environmental impact, depending how far it was going.

**Dr BURNS:** What Mr Jones is saying - and I have been on the public record as saying this as well - is in the unlikely event that there needed to be further assessment, further assessment would be carried out. We want to do things properly, member for Brennan. This is a very important development for the Northern Territory. It is \$100m-worth of taxpayers' money, and we want to do the right thing by the waterfront and the development. I am not privy to what the three short-listed proponents have put forward. I am trusting a fully probity audited process to do that, and I am very much looking forward to seeing the successful proponent's plans.

**Mr BURKE:** Well, yes. I would like to put on the record clearly that, if necessary, there will be future EIS impact studies conducted on the ...

**Dr BURNS:** No. I am already on the record as saying there would be further assessment if necessary.

**Mr BURKE:** Okay. Well tell me: on the one hand you have just said that you have done this catch-all EIS on a master plan that you have not seen and do not even know anything about, and you are confident that that EIS is going to carry you through on any impact on the future built environment - that impact you do not even know in terms of the actual master plan.

**Dr BURNS:** Well, that is your assertion.

**Mr BURKE:** How, in that EIS, do you accommodate, for example, a town beach? How is it accommodated in your EIS?

**Dr BURNS:** You have already asked that question, and it has been answered. I have laid it on the record here that I believe that the EIS is the broad scope, it is the platform, it is the foundation for future development down there in the waterfront area. I have also laid it on the record that, if necessary, there would be further assessment to accommodate anything major that is outside the scope of the EIS. That is it, pure and simple, member for Brennan.

**Mr BURKE:** Do you consider a town beach in scope or out of scope?

**Dr BURNS:** I believe there are precedents. Would you like to talk about that, Mr Chambers?

**Mr CHAMBERS:** Thank you, minister. I can understand the difficulty people are having making this judgment about whether an EIS can adequately deal with it. It may be worth looking back in history a little because, when we first started and made the decision to do the port at East Arm, there was an environmental impact assessment carried out at that time. However, it was of a similar strategic nature as to the one Mr Jones and Mr Bigg outlined; that is, at the time we did the assessment for East Arm Port, there was no way we could envisage all the developments that might occur over the next 20 or 50 years or, indeed, individual developments that might occur on the platform of the port, or in the adjacent area - whether it be dredging or otherwise.

The outcome of that EIS was a environmental management plan, referred to here, which requires proponents, and the manager of the facility, to take account of those environmental issues. Even today, we have proposals that have been around for a decade or more about establishing mini-refineries at East Arm. The industry fuel terminal was assessed but, at the time, we could not have contemplated that. However, in a generic sense, we knew there would be industrial development and future dredging. Therefore, the initial EIS was a very broad scope that contemplated those things. Similarly here, we have a environmental impact assessment process that is contemplating a very broad scope of development. If you go back to our plans and visions for Darwin that have involved the city waterfront areas, over the years, different planners and architects have played around with different scopes. We have had town beaches here and there, we have had big buildings, little buildings, convention centres, marinas - almost everything known in the minds of planners.

The EIS is contemplating that any or all of those things could happen. If you go back to a town beach, if it was of such a significant impact, or perceived impact, the Office of Environment and Heritage would advise the minister that a supplementary EIS may be necessary for that particular development. However, if it was broadly contemplated within the initial assessment and the environmental management plan, the judgment of the independent officers within Environment and Heritage may be that no further assessment is required, or modifications to the environment management plan might be needed. Of course, those conditions are then built into the development permit. If you look at the ConocoPhillips development at Wickham Point, their development permit includes well over 100 conditions, most of which are derived from comments from the environmental impact process.

So, the linkage there is between the environmental assessment process built into the development approval process, to give that surety that these issues are being managed. However, none of us have the crystal ball to do it. If you waited until you knew the master plan to do the EIS, you would always be behind the eight ball and, indeed, there is no need.

For the record, I could say we are doing exactly the same thing at Glyde Point. Environmental assessment is about assessing the impact of creating the platform, for any number of industries that could occur there, from fertiliser plants to aluminium plants. If an aluminium plant came along to build on that platform, it may be assessed as requiring detailed environmental impact study in its own right. So, these things are not static, and I guess we have to learn to live with the fact that, over a decade or two decades, things will change and we need to keep using the process to manage that.

**Mr BURKE:** Yes, that is the confidence I wanted. No one is against having a EIS up-front; what we want is the confidence that if there is future impact from that development, that the appropriate environmental impact studies and statements will be made to accommodate those ...

**Dr BURNS:** I have said that there will be further assessment, member for Brennan.

**Mr BURKE:** You talked about Glyde Point. Is the Glyde Point development a controlled action under the Commonwealth *Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act*?

**Mr JONES:** Yes, it is.

**Dr BURNS:** That is Neville Jones.

**Mr BURKE:** It is? Will the appropriate notifications occur?

**Mr JONES:** Yes.

**Mr BURKE:** Was that as a result of the Commonwealth prompting you, or vice versa?

**Dr BURNS:** Address it through me, member for Brennan.

**Mr JONES:** No, the answer to that is that the department lodged what is termed a referral document under the Commonwealth scheme, with the Commonwealth Department of Environment and Heritage.

**Mr BURKE:** DHA land at the end of Lee Point - that is Commonwealth land?

**Dr BURNS:** It is.

**Mr BURKE:** Will the Northern Territory *Planning Act* apply to that development and have precedence?

**Dr BURNS:** Mr Bigg has informed me it now belongs to DHA, which I suppose is a Commonwealth entity. I am not sure of the distinctions there, but that is for the record.

**Mr BURKE:** What are the controls of the DHA development that you have? Commonwealth land in a private developer's hands?

**Dr BURNS:** Yes, it will have to go through the DCA. That is my advice. Would you like to expand on that, Mr Bigg?

**Mr BIGG:** The Department of Defence sold the land to the DHA, so it is now freehold land owned by DHA. Therefore, it is subject to the full planning process of the Northern Territory.

**Mr BURKE:** When I was briefed the other day, you told me you had an MOU in place with DHA with regards to that development.

**Mr BIGG:** I am sorry?

**Mr BURKE:** Didn't you tell me you have a memorandum of understanding in place with DHA for that development?

**Dr BURNS:** I am advised, member for Brennan, that there is an MOU in place and it is all about cooperative, mutual support, between Defence Housing and the Northern Territory government to facilitate that particular development. I am sure you are aware that DHA is currently looking for a developer - a proponent - to facilitate that particular development. I believe that announcement will be made within a couple of months.

**Mr BIGG:** They are anticipating about October or November for that.

**Mr BURKE:** Why didn't the Northern Territory government buy the land?

**Dr BURNS:** This was a proposal that was brought forward by the DHA and they want to be involved

in the development. They, obviously, have a plan to house and better house military personnel and their agenda is that, from my recollection, the development will be approximately 600 – is that correct? Yes, approximately 600, and approximately half of those will be Defence personnel. So, basically, half the half the houses in the development will be for Defence personnel and half will be for other people. It is a fantastic development. The government supports it, in that it will bring about a lot of building activity for subcontractors. They are humming out at Palmerston now, but they will hum even more when this comes on stream, member for Brennan.

**Mr BURKE:** If you checked last year's transcript, Mr Vatskalis, your former minister said that it was too expensive for the Northern Territory government to buy, and the headworks were too expensive for the Northern Territory government to commit to. It is now in the hands of a private developer who is going to make a profit off that development, who has to pay for all the headworks and has paid for the land. So, it is a development that needs to be closely controlled in ensuring that it is not overly dense, for starters, so that they do not optimise the development. I want to know what controls the government has - because you have lost the opportunity to buy the land - over DHA. Also, if you have an MOU with DHA, can you table the details of the MOU?

**Dr BURNS:** Member for Brennan, my understanding - I may stand corrected here - is that the development will not be overly dense; that there is quite adequate spacing and land sizes for those houses. In terms of my predecessor's comment, I bring you back to the point that, as a government, we inherited a black hole ...

**Members** interjecting.

**Mr BURKE:** What are the details of the MOU?

**Dr BURNS:** Well, you do not want to hear about it. We have had our deficit reduction strategy and, in some ways, it may have involved tightening our belt in some areas. I am quite comfortable with the fact that DHA have come in here - they have capital, they have backing, they have an agenda of housing military personnel. Why should government do everything? The DHA wanted to do this; I commend them for it. We will cooperate with them to the nth degree to get this development on-stream, to get the buildings coming up and the contractors and the housing industry working on that particular development. It is going to be a great boon for Darwin and the Northern Territory. I do not know why you are talking it down. You have asked a question about density, and I will ask Mr Bigg to comment on that, please.

**Mr BIGG:** Thank you. Obviously, the design of the urban area has not happened yet. As already noted, DHA is seeking a development partner, a joint venture partner, who will obviously have influence over the development. So, although DHA has done some early work, the urban design has not actually occurred. There has not been a development application, obviously, as yet.

**Mr BURKE:** Is the MOU binding?

**Mr BIGG:** No, it is a cooperative document.

**Mr BURKE:** So, it is on a hope and a prayer that DHA will do the right thing? You have a private developer who is going to get their own private joint partner who could come from anywhere – it may not be a Territory firm, it might be a Queensland firm - government has no control over that development, which was prime land offered to the government at the outset by the Commonwealth, except through the DCA. You cannot even tell me the densities of the development?

**Mr BIGG:** Not at this moment, not the exact density of the development, but it is ...

**Mr Burke:** Can you give me the details of the MOU?

**Dr BURNS:** Hold on, hold on, Mr Burke.

**Mr BIGG:** ... but it is subject to the planning process, which has guidelines on those issues.

**Mr BURKE:** Can you give me the details of the MOU?

**Dr BURNS:** Member for Brennan, are you seriously suggesting that the Defence Housing Authority is going to build a ghetto for military personnel? Are you suggesting that?

**Mr BURKE:** Not only am I suggesting it, but part of my electorate contains DHA developments, and one of the problems with those developments is that, if you do not watch them closely, they are too dense. You sit in one person's backyard and you look in to five, and soldiers do not like it; it creates a problem for them. What I am saying to you is you have lost total control of that development except through an MOU. That MOU is not binding. Can you tell me what the detail for the MOU is?

**Dr BURNS:** You are forgetting about the development consent process, member for Brennan. I am satisfied about this development and the benefit it will bestow on the Territory economy. I ask you to stop talking it down.

**Mr BURKE:** Would you give me the details of the MOU, minister?

**Dr BURNS:** You have talked down Defence Housing. Have you talked to your Commonwealth ...

**Mr BURKE:** They do not mind being talked down; they are a business. They have got to do business, make money for themselves. I am looking after soldiers and people who live in the houses. They know that and you should be on their back, too. What are the details of the MOU?

**Dr BURNS:** What are you doing about it through your federal colleagues? Surely, they have some control over Defence Housing if you think they are going around the countryside building ghettos. That is a silly thing to say.

**Mr BURKE:** I never said that at all. I said you have to watch the development. Will you give me the details of the MOU, minister?

**Dr BURNS:** Yes, I will give you the MOU.

**Mr BURKE:** Thank you.

**Dr BURNS:** I will put it in the post to you.

**Mr BURKE:** How many blocks are they going to turn out?

**Dr BURNS:** I said approximately 600. That is my understanding; is that correct?

**Mr BIGG:** It could be a little more than 600, but we cannot talk about an exact figure, obviously, Mr Burke, because the urban design has not happened yet.

**Mr BURKE:** Will you table that MOU?

**Dr BURNS:** Have I got here?

**Mr BIGG:** No, sorry. we do not have it here.

**Dr BURNS:** No, but I will certainly send it to you, member for Brennan.



**Ms LAWRIE:** Question on notice.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** Yes, it would be a question on notice. To assist Hansard to and ensure the minister is fully aware of the question, would the shadow minister please restate the question?

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**Question on Notice**

**Mr BURKE:** Could the minister provide the details of the MOU that is in place with Defence Housing, and also confirm that that MOU is not binding?

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** Minister, you do accept to take it on notice?

**Dr BURNS:** Yes.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** That being the case, I allocate number 7.1 to the question.

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**Mr CHAIRMAN:** Are there any questions from the committee?

**Mr WOOD:** Thank you, Mr Chairman. I might just make the comment that ...

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** Is it a question?

**Mr WOOD:** I would like to make a comment because the minister started off saying how important this department is and, because of the importance of this department, we really do not, in this case, have enough time to go through such a broad portfolio. It is huge.

**Ms Lawrie** interjecting.

**Mr WOOD:** I am allowed to make that comment.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** Member for Nelson, you made your comment. I am getting a bit restless about all these comments about we do not have enough time, when people keep making these statements.

**Members** interjecting.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** If you are genuine, ask questions.

**Mr Baldwin:** Stop interrupting and let him get on.

**Mr WOOD:** Minister, Chairman, I have sat here for one-and-a-half hours. I have never commented on the time until now. I will get on with Output 1.2.

Minister, you have a Development Consent Authority that has now been set up slightly differently than the previous government, where there are two so-called community members. Could you tell us who are the two community members on the Litchfield Development Consent Authority? I will follow it up, while you are doing that, with: could you tell us whether either of those people live in Litchfield Shire?

**Dr BURNS:** We have Mr Richard Luxton and Mr Ted Warren.

**Mr WOOD:** Do either of those people live in ...

**Dr BURNS:** It is Litchfield and Batchelor actually.

**Mr WOOD:** No, I want to know: do either of those people live in Litchfield Shire?

**Dr BURNS:** I am informed that Mr Luxton was on that particular Development Consent Authority previously, and I have reappointed him, on advice. I am not sure about Mr Warren, but I believe he does live in the rural area. I would have to check that, member for Nelson.

**Mr WOOD:** I am not making any comment on the two people. They are probably very good people. I am quite happy with their credentials but, surely people in Litchfield Shire would be more comfortable with community people from the Litchfield Shire - living in Litchfield Shire, making decisions about the Litchfield Shire for people who live there.

**Dr BURNS:** Point taken, member for Nelson. To be honest with you, I do not recollect. There were quite a few applications to each of the DCAs across the Territory. What I tried to do was appoint people with an interest and experience. In some instances, I was able to appoint people who were actually living in a particular area or jurisdiction and, in other instances, I was not able to. However, I genuinely tried to appoint the best people to those different consent authorities. That would be my reply.

**Mr WOOD:** Minister, would you think it was a fair concern of mine that, if a person who not only did not live in the shire, but really had very little involvement in planning matters, would be appointed to make decisions within the Litchfield Shire?

**Dr BURNS:** As I was saying, right across the Territory - there is Darwin, Palmerston, Litchfield, Batchelor, Katherine, Alice Springs and Tennant Creek – in each one of those DCAs, I genuinely tried to appoint the best people, who I felt had a genuine interest in planning matters and the areas, and could contribute to each one of those DCAs.

Member for Nelson, I am not going to make everyone happy all of the time, but I can emphasise again, it was a genuine effort on my part to do my best. I do not have all the details of the applications in front of me, and I do not believe it would be appropriate for me to bring out the names here and say: 'These people applied for this one and those applied for that one'. It would not be the right thing to do. All I can give you is my genuine assurance.

**Mr WOOD:** Thank you, minister. I would not ask you for that, anyway. I am just commenting on the principle.

**Dr BURNS:** I am also informed that local government does make appointments to each one of those DCAs. It is an amalgam, and local government does have a say through their appointments of local people, most definitely.

**Mr WOOD:** I understand that, minister. But the other two people were meant to be community representatives, and one would believe that the community meant community in which they lived.

**Dr BURNS:** The Mayor of Palmerston has also written to me on this issue.

**Mr BURKE:** It is her birthday today.

**Dr BURNS:** Is it? Happy birthday!

**Mr WOOD:** Do we all get to kiss her?

**Mr BURKE:** No, and I have not got her a present, so do not waste any time with ...

**Dr BURNS:** She did write to me on this issue, and I replied back to her that, in future, I am more than willing to incorporate in the selection process a criteria that the person lives locally, or in that local precinct. I have taken the message on board; I am endeavouring to change that. Unfortunately - I am not saying in this particular one - in some of the areas there were not a lot of applications. The more people who apply from a local area, I suppose, the more talent from a local area - people putting their hand up. As you know, member for Nelson, we are living in an age where volunteerism, unfortunately, is in decline. I know it is strictly not a volunteer role here, but people are giving up of their time. It is a difficult role, because you are deciding about developments in a particular area. But message received, and I have tried to rectify it.

**Mr WOOD:** Thank you, minister. I emphasise once again, I am not commenting on the worth or otherwise of those people. As far as I know, they do a very good job.

**Dr BURNS:** I am also informed that councils can nominate community members as well. But, message received, member for Nelson.

**Mr WOOD:** Minister, there was some discussion about the 33-storey building, and we discussed the waterfront site. One of the things that concerns me - and I raised it especially in relation to the 33-storey building - was that the intention with the design of that building was to have five storeys of louvres to cover five storeys of car parking which was not going to go underground. Minister, do you believe that, in a city like Darwin which is now developing high-rise buildings fairly quickly, there needs to be some judgment - I realise it is subjective - of the architectural value of what we are putting in our city? Or are we just going to allow buildings to go up purely on engineering and planning guidelines? Should there be some, at least, subjective judgment as to what these buildings - a 33-storey building is not something that you will not avoid, even a 25-storey building, you will not to avoid. It is something that we should really be looking at?

**Dr BURNS:** The whole issue of merit in buildings is a vexed one, as the element of taste comes in there.

**Mr WOOD:** I am talking about major buildings here.

**Dr BURNS:** Government, as you know, has appointed a government architect. Whilst it has not been popular in some sections, it has been welcomed by the architectural fraternity, generally, in the Territory - nearly universally. We are talking about Mr Bob Nation here, someone who is the incoming chair or President of the Institute of Architects Australia - someone who has a fantastic reputation. He is having input in the waterfront development. However, I agree with you on the whole issue. A lot of residents of Darwin and Alice Springs, or elsewhere in the Territory, want a unique Territorian - whether it is a desert or Top End - flavour in our architecture. It is an issue which I am wrestling with in terms of merit and the whole idea of amenity through the *Planning Act*. It is a hard one to wrestle with, but I agree with you we need to be careful that we do not become a metropolis like every other city in the world, since Darwin is unique or still has lot of parts that are uniquely Darwin. The remedy is through a public process of discussion and consultation and, I suppose, incorporating elements into the Planning Scheme. I am not sure whether Mr Bigg wants to comment further.

**Mr BIGG:** I would not want to comment on that, minister.

**Mr WOOD:** Minister, my next question is regarding the future township of Waddell. Could you say what the guidelines are to the development of Waddell. Have there been any plans or preliminary plans drawn up for what the city will look like, and have you any idea of a time line for staging the development of that city?

**Dr BURNS:** As you know, member for Nelson, the previous government wanted to put a dam across

the Elizabeth river and, basically, kill all the mangroves so that there would not be any bities there for a large-scale development. They saw the writing on the wall; there was big backflip there. I am not sure whether it was the member for Daly in the hot seat at that time.

There are still plans for a township at Waddell, and even further plans, should development and population warrant it, at Glyde Point. These things are really contingent on development and population. I defer to Mr Jones in terms of time line but, to my knowledge, there is not a physical representation of what Waddell might look like. I would be someone who would be advocating tropical design and architecture, plenty of amenity and social infrastructure out there. Would Mr Jones like to come forward and - oh sorry, Mr O'Neil.

**Mr O'NEILL:** Jim O'Neill. To my knowledge there has been no detailed planning or design work done on Waddell. At the moment, it is just at the structure plan stage, identifying the land area.

**Mr WOOD:** Minister, in that case - and I have asked this in previous years - why can't you do something similar to what you are doing to the waterfront and ask for different designs? I have said you could have a competition to design Waddell, so we can come up with a range of what you might say are three dimensional appearances for the city.

**Ms Lawrie:** It is a long way off.

**Mr WOOD:** It might be a long way of but, as soon as Palmerston is full, you will have to start to develop Waddell.

**Dr BURNS:** That is true, member for Nelson, and you have made a worthwhile suggestion. You are aware that this is the Year of the Built Environment, and the government is having a number of competitions about tropical architecture and design. I am not sure where that particular one is. Maybe that could be a template for what you are suggesting. Did you want to report on the Year of the Built Environment, Mr Chambers?

**Mr CHAMBERS:** I can start, minister, thank you. The Year of the Built Environment has attracted a lot of interest in public terms because of those issues that have been raised about the standard of design. As part of the package of issues the government implemented - and the Government Architect appointment was one - there is a competition at the moment inviting - and I think it has closed, and it is currently being assessed. There was a house lot provided in Darwin, Palmerston, Alice Springs and Katherine seeking expressions of interest from people who were prepared to design and build a house that really reflected the environment in which it is situated, and would become an exemplar, if you like, of good design in those areas.

In addition to that, the design requirements for the sale of the land of the former Arafura Bowling Club has required extensive issues to be addressed relating to the built environment. Again, to be a good demonstration model of a built environment that would be more in tune with public expectations. That would address issues of density etcetera ...

**Dr Burns:** And open space.

**Mr CHAMBERS:** And open space. Indeed, the government committed on that one at the request of residents that a large open space on that corner be a park which the Darwin City Council has agreed to take over and maintain.

**Mr WOOD:** Thank you, minister. I suppose what I was really asking for - and I agree with what Mr Chambers has said - but was a design of a city; that is, a central part of a city - I suppose I keep looking at Walter Burleigh Griffiths' design of Canberra. I am not saying that is what it should be. However, someone had a vision, and knew where we were going with what the city was going to look. Without denigrating Palmerston, I would struggle to find anyone that the thought that the CBD was a wonderful piece of design work. We got rid of roundabouts to put traffic lights in because part of the

CBD was built on the other side. We have Woolworths on the other side from Coles. I hope we do not go down that path. I hope we can build a city that we can recognise is Weddell by specific building, by specific design - whether it is lakes, nice six-lane avenues or whatever. All I am asking is: would the government at least look at opening a design competition for Weddell to see what designers - international, national or local - could come up with for that city before we get into the path of whether we worry about whether each individual house is built correctly or not?

**Dr BURNS:** As I said before, member for Nelson, it is a great idea; you are a man of vision. When Weddell comes up on the horizon, I will certainly take your suggestion on board. However, it is a little way off yet.

**Mr WOOD:** Thank you minister. There are a couple of other questions regarding the NT Planning Scheme. The member for Brennan raised the issue. It has been around since at least a year to nearly two years before you were elected. What stage is it at now?

**Dr BURNS:** You know how to ask good questions, member for Nelson. It has taken a long time because there has been a lot of consultation. I suppose it is something that impacts on development and amenity. It impacts on so many things that it has taken some time - probably longer than I would like. I am trying to hurry it up. Maybe you would like to comment again, Mr Bigg.

**Mr BIGG:** Just a clarification, Mr Wood. When you talk about the planning scheme are you talking about the review of the *Planning Act* or the planning scheme that we addressed before?

**Mr WOOD:** The big NT Planning Scheme that has had a change.

**Mr BIGG:** Mr O'Neill is working on that at the moment so, with your permission, minister.

**Dr BURNS:** Mr O'Neill.

**Mr O'NEILL:** We have been continuously refining that piece of work over - as you pointed out - an extended period. However, it has been delayed on the basis of advice that we need to have the *Planning Act* through and passed and in legislation for the new scheme to be put on exhibition under that legislation. We have not stopped developmental work, but we are going to have to wait for the new act to be passed.

**Mr WOOD:** Through you, minister, you do know that your Litchfield plan that you have just passed includes of the zones out of the Northern Territory Planning Scheme, which Mr O'Neill has just said has not been approved yet. What will happen if the Northern Territory Planning Scheme is approved with modification that do not match those new zones you put in the Litchfield Area Plan? Will you have to go back to Litchfield and change their zones again?

**Dr BURNS:** I hope those complications do not arise, member for Nelson.

**Mr WOOD:** I did warn you before.

**Dr BURNS:** It is a large job because, with all the planning areas - and I mentioned the different consent authorities throughout the Territory - there are variations between each one in terminology, rules, schemes, language and the rest of it. What we are trying to do is to consolidate it down into one integrated package. It is proving to be a large task.

**Mr WOOD:** Minister, in *Regional Highlights* at page 16, there is mention of \$200 000 to review and amend the Northern Territory Planning Scheme as it applies to the city of Darwin and the region. Are you going down the same path as you did for Litchfield Shire by using the Northern Territory Planning Scheme to develop a Darwin Planning Scheme? What does it mean; that you will amend the Northern Territory Planning Scheme as it applies to the city of Darwin?

**Mr BIGG:** The \$200 000 is the notional amount allocated, obviously, to the Darwin region for that issue.

**Mr WOOD:** No, it says the 'city of Darwin', not Darwin region.

**Mr BIGG:** That is right, yes. What was the question?

**Mr WOOD:** What is that actually for, in relation to the NT Planning Scheme, which I was just talking about? I will read it. It says:

*\$0.2m to review and amend the Northern Territory Planning Scheme as it applies to the city of Darwin and the region within the framework of the Planning Act.*

What is that about?

**Dr BURNS:** I understand your question now, member for Nelson. That is saying that the \$200 000 is for consultation support of amending the planning scheme, not only in Darwin but throughout the regions in the Territory.

**Mr WOOD:** But hasn't that been done already? That planning scheme has been around to councils and ...

**Dr BURNS:** The whole of the Northern Territory Planning Scheme - that is what I mentioned before - is all about consolidation in terminology and everything. Did you want to elaborate on that, Mr Bigg?

**Mr BIGG:** There is continuous work on it. As I said, Mr O'Neill and his people are working on that. I do not know exactly the derivation of that figure, but it must be applying to this work. There are 15-odd planners who work for Mr O'Neill across the development assessment and planning area, so that would relate to their work.

**Mr WOOD:** Minister, can I ask you some specific questions in relation to Litchfield planning?

**Dr BURNS:** You did write me a very long letter about it and I have replied to you.

**Mr WOOD:** I did.

**Dr BURNS:** Have you received my reply?

**Mr WOOD:** I did, I did.

**Mr BURKE:** Well, that is sufficient.

**Dr BURNS:** I beg your pardon?

**Mr BURKE:** I said that should be sufficient.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** For most people it would be, member for Brennan.

**Dr BURNS:** No, the member for Nelson has got a passion for the Litchfield - and we actually listened to a lot that the member for Nelson had to say and suggested. We tried to incorporate as much as we could. However, somewhere along the line, there are some things that you do not agree with or might need further clarification, so I am more than happy to take questions.

**Mr WOOD:** Minister, it is not just Litchfield Shire. You will notice that Litchfield Shire takes in some of the biggest development in the Darwin region. It takes in Glyde Point and Middle Arm Peninsula. These areas are not specific to little old Howard Springs; they are very important to the Territory as a whole.

Minister, you wrote a letter to the *NT News* on 7 June in reply to my letter of 31 May regarding harbour development. I was referring to Middle Arm Peninsula and the reasons I believe these leases have been permitted so that industrial development would occur. You said in this letter:

*In fact, 20 leases have been granted since 1995, with seven granted by the Martin government.*

I have documentation which shows that 11 leases were granted by your government, totalling 266 hectares, in three years; and the previous government allowed eight leases of 216 hectares in three years. What I am saying is, regardless of whether you agree or disagree with those figures, that your government could have, if it wanted to, stop approvals for mining on that land, because it had a Reservation from Occupation which required ministers to give approval for any mining - in fact it was not to be mined. Your government could actually have made a decision not to mine that land, so it could have been left for something else besides industrial.

You then say that, since 1984, the land has been zoned for future industrial use. In other words, you are backing up the use of the land for mining with the statement that, since 1984, the land has been zoned for future industrial use. Minister, under the Litchfield area plan, the land was never zoned industrial. It was zoned Future Uses, which prohibited extractive industry, light industry, and general industry. Therefore, the land was not zoned industrial. There was a concept that it could be industrial. Will you say that you were wrong in saying the land was zoned industrial?

**Dr BURNS:** Member for Nelson, I act on advice. That was the advice that was tended to me in relation to the mining leases. That, of course, is the minister for mines, in terms of that information. So, inasmuch as I rely on advice, I stand behind that information. However, possibly Mr Jones might want to comment on your last point.

**Mr JONES:** Mr Wood, the mining of extractive minerals takes place under the *Mining Act*, and does not require the approval under the *Planning Act*. You do not create zones for extractive mining. It is true that the Litchfield Land Use Planning Concepts and Land Use Objectives pay great attention to extractors, because it is a major industry within that region, and extractive resources are important for the development of a city. However, you do not create planning zones under the *Planning Act* for the mining of extractives; that is administered under the *Mining Act*.

**Mr WOOD:** The land was, by *Gazette* from the previous minister for mining - which was Daryl Manzie - declared a Reservation from Occupation, which started on 4 June 1997. The Reservation from Occupation was put there to say, basically, no mining. The only person who was allowed to approve it was the mines minister.

**Ms LAWRIE:** So shouldn't this question be directed ...

**Mr WOOD:** No, because it relates to why the land is now being dug up and the decision made to be industrial land. I do not accept what Mr Jones has said; I believe that the land was declared. The department wants it to be industrial and, to make sure it is industrial, they have basically said that the land will, in future, be industrial for the mines department. The mines department will then allow it to be mined.

**Dr BURNS:** Member for Nelson, when I first took on these portfolios you and I met, and we had a long conversation about quite a range of issues. As a result of that conversation, and your concerns about the harbour and other issues, we took a helicopter ride to get the scope of what you were

saying. I took your concerns to heart. I received extensive briefings on your concerns, and I wrote quite a detailed reply to you, in which I acknowledged that that area of land does have a sorry history. However, you cannot rewrite history.

Basically, you asked a question about the rehabilitation of that land, and I informed you that it would take many millions of dollars to rehabilitate it. Also, basically, in its use in the future, it would be used as light industrial land as support for the gas facility, and also the harbour. Whilst I agree with you about history and whatever, I cannot rewrite history, member for Nelson. I replied to you in quite a detailed fashion on that issue.

**Mr WOOD:** Minister, what other industry is required in the middle of the harbour in relation to the LNG plant?

**Dr BURNS:** I believe there is service industries. We are also talking about the port. I know that you have suggested a bridge across there.

**Mr WOOD:** No, your department suggested a bridge. I think it is a dopey idea.

**Dr BURNS:** I think we clarified - we could probably spend many hours on this. I know you think it is an important issue. However, if you want us to lay it on the record again, I will defer to Mr Jones on those issues specifically about what sort of industry can be carried on in that area

**Mr WOOD:** In relation to the gas plant.

**Dr BURNS:** Yes. And the harbour.

**Mr WOOD:** No, no. Into the gas plant.

**Dr BURNS:** Well, no. Because you cannot set, I think ...

**Mr WOOD:** You can.

**Dr BURNS:** My understanding is that it is there to support both, so I am going to ask Mr Jones to comment on both. The other issue you had was in relation to the bridge. Can you just lay that on the record, please, Mr Jones?

**Mr JONES:** Since 1984, in land use concepts, the Middle Arm Peninsula has been identified as an area for industrial land use. Indeed, in 1984, the former Section 1, an area of land that was privately-owned freehold, and had been freehold since late 1800s, was compulsorily acquired by the Northern Territory government for development as industrial land. There were a number of proposals at that time, including an LNG plant, an oil refinery and the relocation of fuel storage facilities from Darwin. They were some of the uses that were contemplated.

The fact that extractive - you do not need to have an industrial zone for there to be extractive mining permits issued under the *Mining Act*. I do not have details of the Reservations of Occupations in mining but, with past experience, that is a phrase or a terminology that does not necessarily mean what it sounds like. I would hazard a guess that what it means is that is the mechanism by which there are controls placed over extractive mining on the Middle Arm Peninsula. Those controls are to preserve the land for its future development; in other words permits will only be issued on land above 8 m 8HD, and excavations can not extend more than 2 m below the surface.

I cannot, Mr Chairman, say with entirely that is what the reason the Reservation from Occupation under the *Mining Act* is. However, I do know that there are special conditions applying to extractives on that area.



The Middle Arm Peninsula is now zoned primarily into two separate areas. I would ignore the bits and pieces that relate to main roads, closed roads, utilities and railway. There are two major zones and these are now incorporated into the Litchfield Area Plan 2004. Those zones are DV – development - and OC - open space conservation. Development provides for industry that is of strategic economic importance to the Northern Territory. Full uses under such a zone would be by consent - yes. The types of industry that are contemplated, without producing a limited list, are those related to natural gas-based industries, port, rail and transport. With due respect, minister, I doubt this is light industry. Light industry generally occurs in a zone that is zoned exactly for that. However, there is then a caveat which applies to the development zones on Middle Arm Peninsula, which is that there be no gas-based manufacture. That would not prevent, for example, a firm that had a major maintenance contract on the LNG plant establishing its own facilities in that area to service the LNG plant.

In planning terms - there was a similar exchange to this in last year's meeting - there have been a number of reports that were written internally in the department over time; there are a number of reports that have been written externally; and some have been commissioned. A report that Mr Wood has referred to in the past, which was prepared by Halliburton KBR, or Keller Brown Root, confirmed a view that was held within the department that, in time with the growth of the port and railway, the amount of land that was available on the East Arm Peninsula would rapidly become limited and extremely expensive and, if all things worked, all things being equal, it would generate a demand for what was referred to as 'port back land'. That is why the concept planning - and I emphasis concept planning - for the Middle Arm Peninsula contains things like roads and railways. It is designed to provide a linkage between East Arm Peninsula, the Middle Arm Peninsula and, indeed, Glyde Point on the Gunn Point Peninsula.

The fact that these conceptual planning documents indicate a bridge across the East Arm - that is, the body of water at East Arm - is purely a concept, the same as on some maps you could actually find the line that indicates the possibility of a sub-sea pipeline from Middle Arm to East Arm. These things are there in planning concept documents. They are not, in fact, there as statements in law or in fact.

**Mr Burke:** Sounds like damming the Elizabeth River concept to me!

**Dr Burns:** Oh, no. It is not on the capital works program!

**Mr WOOD:** Minister, there is a zone for the centre of the harbour. It is called DV. There is a special section in your plan which, I presume, limited what sort of development would occur there. From the number of comments made by your predecessors and the Chief Minister about what type of development was going to be there, one would have said it would have to be light industry. I think the Chief Minister at one time on the *7.30 Report* said Winnellie-type development, which I would not regard as heavy. There is certainly an uncertainty about what is expected to go there.

Could I bring up the point of the bridge. I do not believe it was intended to be a concept because the idea of developing the centre of the harbour as a rail/port/industrial area was to connect it to the port. To save you going an awfully long way through Palmerston, they needed to have that bridge there to make the system work - that you had that interconnection, that hub of Middle Arm/East Arm. If you take that bridge away, you might as well build in land north of Howard Springs, because you are actually closer, on the proposed 100 m corridor to Glyde Point and the spur railway line.

Minister, do you believe that people in Darwin really support the idea - which I do not believe has ever been debated because the Darwin Regional Land Use Structure Plan, the concept plan, was never published and debated. That is why it took such an effort to get rid of the dams on the Darwin Harbour, because they were a concept that was starting to come into place. The previous government put out a consultancy to find out about the mud and the biting insects, etcetera. Minister, do you believe the people in Darwin want the centre of their harbour to become an industrial estate?

**Dr BURNS:** Are you talking about the geographical centre of the harbour?

**Mr WOOD:** I am talking about Middle Arm. That is why it is called 'middle'.

**Dr BURNS:** Because when I look out at the harbour through my window I can see Talc Head.

**Mr WOOD:** That is the other side of the harbour, minister.

**Dr BURNS:** Other side? Well, it depends where you are talking about the middle.

**Mr WOOD:** I am talking about the piece that you fly over. Do you ...

**Dr BURNS:** There is no doubt, member for Nelson, we have development in the port out there - very important infrastructure for the Northern Territory - gas coming onshore at Wickham Point. There is some development there. There is also some residential development planned, as you said, in relation to Weddell. Looking to the future, there may be - may be - some further development at Glyde Point. That is all I can say to you. I do not think any Territorian wants to see heavy industrialised plants or industries there, and the government has given some comfort and indications that that would not occur. That is my reply to you, member for Nelson.

**Mr WOOD:** I will not labour too much more because I know we are running out of time. Minister, in your letter which I mentioned, there was an alternative site for that same type of development closer to the port - just as close as Palmerston - land that you now have marked Rural Living 2, which used to be mainly extractive in the previous plan. You say it would place industry adjacent to Robertson Barracks. I say it would place industry 2 km away from Robertson Barracks. It might place it next to the new training areas and I would say: 'Big deal'. However, under its present boundary, it is 2 km from Robertson Barracks - it is not adjacent - and it would be close to Howard Springs. The nearest resident's land to that is 1 km away through open recreation land. There is at least 1 km of buffer, and that is the Howard River Park. Surely that land ...

**Dr BURNS:** There are some conservation zones out there as well.

**Mr WOOD:** Yes, minister, you have marked them on the map.

**Dr BURNS:** Are you going to mention the ephemeral wetland that I helped you save?

**Mr WOOD:** You did, and I thank you very much, minister. However, if I had to stop arguing about the Litchfield Shire based on one win, I might as well give up. There are plenty of other things we need to look at.

**Dr BURNS:** But I am a minister who listens to you, member for Nelson. I am always ...

**Mr WOOD:** I am feeling good, minister, but I need an answer.

**Dr BURNS:** You know I am always prepared to engage you in discussion. I now you have very firm views about a whole range of things. I can only tell you that, when you raise things with me, I test them and I try to get to the bottom of them. I have spent a lot of time in researching and coming to a conclusion in that letter that I wrote to you ...

**Mr Wood:** I will bring my hankie out in a minute.

**Dr BURNS:** ... and I felt very comfortable in signing off on that letter. That just has to be my reply to you, Gerry.

**Mr WOOD:** But, minister, you said in this letter that I should stick to the facts when making an argument. You said when I asked about that land that the land was adjacent to the barracks. It is not adjacent to the barracks; it is 2 km away. It is not close to Howard Springs residents; it at least 1 km through an open recreation buffer. I would say, minister, you have put an argument against what I

have put forward not based on facts.

**Dr BURNS:** But you are talking about the whole industrial zone through there ...

**Mr Wood:** Minister, there is the land. It is a long way from anywhere.

**Dr BURNS:** ... and a corridor to an industrial zone.

**Mr WOOD:** And you have a corridor going right next to it, with a railway line next to it.

**Dr BURNS:** That is right.

**Mr WOOD:** Well, isn't that the perfect place to put your industry?

**Ms LAWRIE:** A point of order! This is somewhat repetitive. The minister continues to answer.

**Mr WOOD:** It is an important area because it is the future of the centre of our harbour as to where you finally make a decision. There are no industrial estates built there yet, and I say that there is still an opportunity to rehabilitate. Minister, we probably could go on for ages. As you can see, you do have one of the most important portfolios and the reasoning behind what you are doing needs to be public.

**Dr BURNS:** Thank you, member for Nelson.

**Mr WOOD:** Could I just go onto two other quick subjects that do relate to Litchfield Shire. Specifically, you wrote to me about RR zone and land clearing. The RR zone is rural residential. There is no land, as yet, sold or developed with that zone. However, you have now allowed land clearing for a minimum of one hectare. All blocks in the RR zone are one hectare. That means you have the potential, because all that land will be above wetland - you cannot have one hectare below the Q100 - will be subject to clearing without permission. So, in the case of Churcher ...

**Dr BURNS:** Did you read my reply?

**Mr WOOD:** I did, minister, and if you take a trip around Howard River Park, you will find that the biodiversity or the environment of that area on one hectare blocks is retained.

**Dr BURNS:** Well, I did reply to you on that issue.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** Member for Nelson, could I just have a bit of clarification here? Are you reiterating the contents of a letter that you have already ...

**Mr WOOD:** I can.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** ...that you two have corresponded about?

**Dr BURNS:** We have had a lot of correspondence.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** And you are going over that again for the sake of it?

**Mr WOOD:** No, I will get a clarification from the minister.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** No, no. That is fine. You have the floor.

**Mr WOOD:** Minister, you say in your letter that retaining the vegetation of RR blocks will do little for

the protection of habitat and the associated biodiversity. How can you say that? On what basis?

**Dr BURNS:** That is my advice, member for Nelson. Did you want to comment on that and the whole issue of clearing on those RR blocks, Mr O'Neill?

**Mr O'NEILL:** I cannot comment specifically on the issue of biodiversity. What has occurred in the development of the RR zone and the clearing guidelines was that a decision was made not to control clearing on land of less than a hectare. I guess I should be taking advice from CNR in terms of the viability and biodiversity issues on that area of land in Litchfield relating to clearing.

**Mr WOOD:** Minister, before you made that decision, you could only clear half the land under the old guideline. Now you can clear the lot. So every piece of land that you have marked RR zone in the Litchfield Shire now can be potentially cleared, totally, without permission.

**Dr BURNS:** That is not my advice. That is the text of what I said to you; that I did not believe that that would occur. That was my advice.

**Mr WOOD:** Could you say why it would not occur, if clearing is permitted?

**Ms Lawrie:** People do not live out bush to clear their land, Gerry, you know that.

**Mr WOOD:** Oh, they do; they are scared of snakes ...

**Members** interjecting.

**Mr WOOD:** ... especially townies who come out there.

**Ms Lawrie:** It is an estimates process.

**Mr WOOD:** It is an estimates process, but it is the only process. The outcome ...

**Members** interjecting.

**Mr WOOD:** Excuse me, I am debating with the minister. I am not wasting time. It is an important area. As I said to you, on this particular portfolio, we certainly will not have enough time, because it is exceptionally important.

**Ms Lawrie** interjecting.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** Member for Karama, member for Nelson. I would like to reiterate, as I stated earlier, the committee is here to consider the estimates of proposed expenditure contained in the Appropriation Bill 2004-05. Just consider the estimates of proposed expenditure.

I would like to note for the record, member for Nelson, that you are going over correspondence that you had with the minister, and you have, from what I can gather, had quite extensive dialogue. If you want to get it on the record, on TV, and out in newspaper, that is fine. You can do that on the floor of parliament and in all sorts of places. With the limited time we have here to interrogate the budget, that this is a wasteful and indulgent practice that you are going through.

**Mr Dunham:** In your view.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** In my view as the Chairman who wants to get an efficient process going. I am not stopping you from asking your questions on a very important planning issue.

**Mr WOOD:** I would like to comment on what you said. Minister, we now live under accrual budgeting, which is about inputs, outputs and outcomes; it is not just about dollars. Here we have policy - that is what the land use and planning regulation is about, land use policies - that have been made by the minister. The minister has responded. This is probably the only time I have to debate the policies with a range of these departments - a lot of times it is the minister only – and it is a time for the public, at least, to know what some of the issues are. That is why we have 'the public' allowed into these Estimates Committees. So, minister, I am asking you because I believe it is an important issue.

You have now made a new zone in Litchfield Shire, which covers quite a few hectares, which now has no clearing controls and can be potentially all cleared because, as I said, one hectare of land is above all the restrictions. Why cannot you put a restriction that says that you can clear only a maximum of 50% on one hectare blocks?

**Dr BURNS:** I hear what you are saying, member for Nelson, but I can only reiterate the advice that I have had. The advice from CNR is that it will not affect biodiversity, and it is very unlikely that all the block would be cleared. I am prepared to take on board what you are saying here and look a bit further at it.

**Mr WOODS:** Thank you, minister. All I can say then, is if the block is cleared it will definitely affect the biodiversity. There was a report done, I think in the last two years, by someone from conservation, looking at the effect on cleared land, mango plantations and strips of bush, and totally non-cleared land. They have actually carried out some research, which you or the previous minister for Parks and Wildlife might have seen, which showed the effect on biodiversity of clearing - certainly, if you allow this. Most people come to the rural to live where they have birds and that, but it does not always happen.

**Ms LAWRIE** interjecting.

**Mr WOOD:** Well, you do not know what happens in the rural area if you think that is the case. I will accept that, minister, if you would look at it.

**Dr BURNS:** We will continue our dialogue on it, member for Nelson.

**Mr WOODS:** All right. The other one, minister: you know we have had a lot of discussions about the RR zone and one hectare, and animals. You have now allowed one animal per hectare, including the new RR zone. I know you have written to us and said: 'Well, if you take out the horse and the bore, that that is not going to happen'. Well, they will not have bores. The fact is, who is going to go around and check to see if you have a horse on a one hectare block?

**Dr Burns:** You could, member for ...

**Mr WOOD:** No. The whole idea of one hectare in the new zone was to restrict that type of development. Minister, would you look at, again, the practical effects of permitting livestock on one hectare blocks? This is a new zone, do not forget. I am not talking about the old zone.

**Dr BURNS:** I apologise, member for Nelson, I was a bit flippant there. I would be prepared – I have signed this plan into existence. Let us see a year down the track, if you can demonstrate some harm, or some instances, or a whole frequency there, I would be prepared to look at it. You and I can always have a dialogue.

**Mr WOOD:** I know that, thank you, minister. I enjoy the dialogue.

**Dr BURNS:** I take what you say on board, and I take it seriously. I say to you, and place it on the record here: in a years time, if you come back to me and can demonstrate some harm, I will try and do something about it.

**Mr Burke:** You will sitting here, with a bit of luck.

**Ms Lawrie:** Well, you won't be.

**Mr WOOD:** Minister, with regards to land clearing, will we be able to discuss that earlier than one year?

**Dr BURNS:** Well, things take a year. We need a whole cycle of seasons.

**Mr WOOD:** A bulldozer takes five minutes. Would you look at the greening ...

**Dr BURNS:** We are into fast food; we are into fast everything, Gerry. A year is probably a pretty good cycle.

**Mr WOOD:** There is a thing called the accidental clearing syndrome. Would you look at the land clearing, before land is turned off on the RR zone?

**Dr BURNS:** I have given you an undertaking I will go back and test that advice, and I am prepared to think about it.

**Mr WOOD:** Would you come out and have a look at existing one hectare blocks in the ...

**Dr BURNS:** Yes, of course, I will come out. While we are on the way, we go out along the Stuart Highway, and look at all the traffic lights along the Stuart Highway, and come back along Tiger Brennan Drive. Will you take me up on that offer?

**A member:** About time you did it.

**Mr WOOD:** As long as you bring a cut lunch, I am quite happy, minister. You will need it.

**A member:** You will want a walkman as well, minister.

**Mr WOOD:** Thank you.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** Is that that output area finished, Gerry?

**Mr WOOD:** Yes.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** Any more questions?

**Ms Lawrie:** No!

**Mr WOOD:** Some of us might go 'ray, but it is an important area.

**Ms LAWRIE:** No, I did not; I said 'no', as in no more questions, Gerry.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** Committee, that concludes consideration of Output 1.2.

**Dr BURNS:** Mr Chairman, I do have the memorandum of understanding that the member for Brennan requested before, and I seek permission of the committee to table it.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** Certainly.

**Dr BURNS:** I suppose that takes off the question on notice now, does it?

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** It will be sorted out by the Secretary. The committee will now take a break for five minutes. That will mean, of course, that we will finish at 1.05 pm today. If anyone wants to get up and get a drink, we will be back in five minutes, when we will be addressing Output 1.3. Thank you.

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The committee suspended.

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**In committee in continuation:**

**Output 1.3 – Building Regulation**

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** Minister, as I advised earlier, we have just concluded Output 1.2, Land Use Planning and Regulation. The committee will now consider out 1.3, Building Regulation. Shadow minister, any questions?

**Mr BURKE:** No, in the interests of time.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** Committee members, any questions on Output 1.3, Building regulation?

**Mr WOOD:** Yes. Minister, according to the *Regional Highlights* at page 16, there is \$300 000 over the coming year to implement the outcomes of the review of the *Building Act*. When will the public see the new *Building Act* and what is changing? What are the outcomes? I presume you know the answers since you have allocated a certain amount of money to implement them?

**Dr BURNS:** I suppose the *Building Act* review incorporates builder's registration and indemnity insurance, which is quite a complex matter. There have been some issues raised by an industry reference group that has been formed, and I am addressing those. I am hoping that, in particular, the builder's licensing and indemnity will be introduced into parliament in the October sittings.

It is a complex issue, member for Nelson, about definitions of builders. Basically, the proposal is that works \$12 000 and above would require some sort of licensing of a builder. However, where do you draw the line? Putting another roof on your house might cost you \$17 000 or \$18 000. Really, the focus of government is about residential home building. There are many issues – some little, some quite large - that we have to address in bringing that legislation forward. We have had collapse of building companies over a number of years. I am not pointing the finger at any particular government, but building companies do have a ...

**A member:** And since.

**Dr BURNS:** That is right. Some building companies go into liquidation or the builder leaves town in a hurry or whatever. What we are looking at is an indemnity insurance scheme that will protect the home buyers or the home builders against non-completion or non-compliance. That is what we are looking at. It is a very important scheme. It is quite complex and, as I say, I am looking forward to introduction, hopefully, in October. However, I am advised indirectly by Parliamentary Counsel draftsmen that it is quite complex legislation.

**Mr WOOD:** Minister, a second question. Earlier this year, you intervened in some issues regarding certificates of occupancy. Can you say what has happened since then, and how are you dealing with those issues?

**Dr BURNS:** Once again, that is a fairly complex issue and the *status quo* remains. I did intervene. There was a new regulatory regime planned to be introduced. I am being quite honest here. I did not

feel there had been sufficient consultation or engagement with a whole range of industries that would be affected by such a change. I am proud to say that I have met with an industry group and departmental officers have worked up an alternative. I am not at liberty to say what that is now, but I believe that there will be another meeting convened very soon, which not only includes the group that met the first time, but will also include representatives of lending institutions and people from the insurance industry. So, there is progress being made. It is slow, I acknowledge that, but I am determined to try to address this issue with an equitable outcome.

**Mr WOOD:** Will house owners be involved or have a chance to comment on whatever new proposals you propose? They are the ones who are affected.

**Dr BURNS:** I suppose it depends which house owners you ...

**Mr WOOD:** In general – members of the public.

**Dr BURNS:** I am not trying to make it more complicated than it is, but it is quite complicated and technical. If you could suggest to me a representative group for those people, I do not mind putting them on the reference group. The real estate industry is represented at present, and they are people who interface with people buying homes, as are the people who do all the paperwork of transactions and transfer of title from one person to another. As well as builders, there is a whole range of representative organisations.

**Mr WOOD:** No, I am not asking that. I just asked, basically, could it go out for public comment before you decide on it?

**Dr BURNS:** Well, I am prepared for it to go out for public comment. I have to say, member for Nelson, that there are going to be some people who you are never, ever going to be able to give any sort of certificate at all for. These are dwellings that have been built without any application for a licence to build in the first place. They are completely unauthorised buildings. There are always going to be some people who are going to be upset by any change. I am not sure if anyone else wants to comment further.

**Mr BIGG:** Obviously, before there was any change, there would be public education so the people understand what is and is not going on.

**Mr WOOD:** That is good. I just wanted to know whether they could actually comment before it is finally brought forward as policy, that is all - which I thought would be a proper process.

**Dr BURNS:** Member for Nelson, I am more than happy for you to comment on it.

**Mr WOOD:** I own a house, I do. But there are other people that came to me with those concerns.

**Dr BURNS:** But who?

**Mr WOOD:** Well, I am just saying, no, you put an ad in the paper and say: 'Here are the draft changes to the certificate of occupancy legislation or regulations'. People who would like to comment can do so by contacting your office or department.

**Dr BURNS:** Member for Nelson, as I said before, I am not trying to overcomplicate this, but I have to confess that I needed quite a long interactive briefing until I understood what the history was and what a possible way forward is. It is quite a complex technical matter. I am not saying the public cannot understand it, but it does require quite a lot of briefing and understanding. In a way, I see my job as a minister to be an interface between the public and agencies, and policies put forward by agencies. Likewise, my Cabinet colleagues. That is the system of government that we have. I will take on board your suggestion and try and accommodate it.



**Mr WOOD:** Thank you, minister.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** That concludes consideration of Output 1.3. The committee will now consider Output 1.4, Land Management.

**Output 1.4 – Land Management**

**Mr BURKE:** Minister, what sales of Crown land have occurred during 2003-04? Can you list them by item, purchase price and method used? Where is this reflected in the budget papers?

**Dr BURNS:** I am prepared to table this list, member for Brennan, with the Chair and the committee's indulgence.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** That would cover all aspects of the questions?

**Dr BURNS:** Mr Bigg, does it cover all aspects of the question asked by the member for Brennan?

**Mr BURKE:** Where does it appear in the budget papers?

**Mr TINKHAM:** Land Sales.

**Mr BIGG:** It actually appears under the capital appropriation. It is an offset against the department's total budget, so you have the total expenditure less the revenue from land sales.

**Mr BURKE:** The land sales is a line item on its own? It is not coupled up with other revenue?

**Mr BIGG:** It is on its own, yes, in our budget.

**Mr BURKE:** With regard to the Lee Point development, the DHA, item 4.5 of the MOU says that parties acknowledge that there is a current native title claim over the property but, by letter in 2002, the Northern Territory Department of Justice advised that native title has been extinguished. Is that the opinion of the Department of Justice? Is that claim still there? What does it mean?

**Dr BURNS:** Well, that is obviously a question for the Justice minister. But I am not sure whether Mr Bigg wants to comment on that.

**Mr BIGG:** As you are aware, there are a number of native title claims. This is part of what is known as the Larrakia A Claim. It is merely mentioned there because the Commonwealth Attorney-General's Department obviously noted it was there. The firm advice is that that claim has been extinguished, that DHA is able to accept the freehold, and the Commonwealth is able to deal in the land in the first place. That is merely a notation that there is a native claim that exists. However, the firm legal advice and tenure history of the land would strongly suggest that there is nothing standing in the way of development.

**Mr BURKE:** Does that mean that you are confident that the claimants will not proceed in any way?

**Dr BURNS:** I do not think Mr Bigg is saying that. He said what he said of legal opinions on this matter. Obviously, the Commonwealth would have looked very closely at this, and that is the advice.

**Mr BURKE:** Well, can I ask you, minister, how are you going to deal with the claim?

**Dr BURNS:** How am I going to deal with it?

**Mr BURKE:** You have just said there is a ...

**Dr BURNS:** Which claim?

**Mr BURKE:** Well, the Department of Justice says, in their opinion, the claim has been extinguished. However, there is a claim that survives over that land. How are you going to deal with it?

**Dr BURNS:** Mr Bigg has some advice on that.

**Mr BIGG:** In terms of the Larrakia A Claim, as you know, it is before the court. However, in terms of that piece of land, everybody was so confident that there was no native title attached to the land, that they were willing to deal in it. That extends from the Commonwealth Attorney-General's Department, which was able to advise Defence that they could deal in the land and to DHA, who were willing to purchase the land.

**Mr BURKE:** Minister, in the Larapinta Stage 4 development, what is the current status?

**Dr BURNS:** The current status? As you know, there has been a ILUA signed off. The last detail relates to native title. I will just confirm that. Yes, I remember now. It has to go to the Native Title Tribunal, but there are no problems anticipated there. There is also an agreement between government and Lhere Artepe, once it is registered.

**Mr BURKE:** Minister, do you believe a reasonable native title value is 50% of the commercial value of the land claim, as has been agreed in this case? Do you consider that as a good future precedent?

**Dr BURNS:** Well, this is a groundbreaking development; there is no doubt about that. It is true to say that Alice Springs has been landlocked for a long time. This is a government that came along and wanted to negotiate with native title holders. All the doomsayers and nay-sayers have said: 'It is never going to work, it will never happen'. However, we are getting very close.

I commend the Lhere Artepe. I met with them when I was in Alice Springs recently, and they commended this government on our approach.

It is a great development; it is going to release approximately 85 blocks. Government is looking at the whole issue of first home buyers and public housing within that area. This is going to be of great benefit to Alice Springs. It is a fantastic development, and I do not know why people keep on talking it down.

**Mr BURKE:** Minister, regarding the native title interest in the Larapinta land, how do you view this statement: 'They are in possession, they own it, we cannot touch it'? Also, the further statement: 'In reality, it is their land, we cannot take it'?

**Dr BURNS:** The reality is they are native title holders. That was determined by a federal court. I cannot argue with what a federal court said. I do not know whether you are reading from a federal court statement, or what your reading from - or where you are going. However, the fact of the matter is that the native title claimants were found to be the native title claimants within a court judicial system. Government has recognised the outcome of that legal process, and we have negotiated with the native title holders. Once the development is up and running, I do not know whether you will be still complaining, but you are the only ones who are really complaining at this stage.

**Mr BURKE:** I am trying to establish what you and your government - because you are the landlord on pastoral leases - as the landlord, has on your mind what native title constitutes. The statement was made last year by the previous minister, in this Estimates Committee: 'They are in possession, they own it, we cannot touch it. The reality is, it is their land, we cannot touch it'. I am saying to you as the minister responsible, when it comes to native title interest, do you agree that that is a correct interpretation of the native title interest in this case?

**Ms LAWRIE:** A point of order! The Chief Minister has portfolio responsibility for Indigenous Policy. Native title falls under that in terms of portfolio.

**Members** interjecting.

**Dr LIM:** No, this is about land.

**Ms LAWRIE:** He is asking to comment on native title, not on land.

**Dr LIM:** He is the landlord. Don't you understand?

**Ms LAWRIE:** I do understand. I am allowed to call a point of order without all you harpies carrying on.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** I would ask ...

**Dr BURNS:** I am prepared to answer the question ...

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** ... all committee members to settle down.

**Dr Lim:** Yes, well, it is her. That is the one, she sounds like a bloody cat all the time.

**Dr BURNS:** I did actually out of interest ...

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** Hang on, stop ...

**Ms LAWRIE:** What was that comment from the member for Greateorex?

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** ... member, we will not have any personal attacks of that nature on any member of the committee.

**A member:** Good idea.

**Ms LAWRIE:** What was his comment?

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** Let it go through to the keeper.

**Ms LAWRIE:** I will check *Hansard*.

**A member:** Good on you.

**Ms LAWRIE:** Should he withdraw it? Was it offensive?

**Mr BURKE:** Go back to sleep, will you? Let's get on with it.

**Ms LAWRIE:** No, I was not asleep. I am sick of offensive comments from the members of the opposition, in terms of my gender.

**Dr LIM:** You are the most offensive of the lot.

**Ms LAWRIE:** Now, if it was offensive, withdraw it.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** I would ask, so that we can get on, for the member to consider – the comment, as I understand it, was ...

**Dr BURNS:** The answer that I was ...

**Ms LAWRIE:** Sorry, minister. I want to be satisfied that, if there was an offensive comment made in regard to my gender, I want it withdrawn.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** I do not know if it was made in regard to your gender, member for Karama. The comment was something to do with cats.

**Ms LAWRIE:** Member for Greatorex?

**A member:** What's that got to do with gender?

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** Would you please withdraw, for the sake of getting on with business?

**Dr LIM:** I withdraw the word 'cat'.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** Thank you, and if we could just refrain from that sort of personal attack. Minister, please continue.

**Dr BURNS:** I will answer the question. I have read the entire transcript from last year's estimates. I am a minister who does his homework. I do not recall that particular extract. Obviously, he pulled it out. I do not know the context in which those statements were made.

**Mr Burke:** You did not read it well, then.

**Dr BURNS:** I have given my answer. My answer is that there has been recognition by a court of law about the native title rights and native title holders - who they are, what it all constitutes. This government has recognised a decision by a Commonwealth court, and got on with the job of negotiating with native title holders for something that is going to be to the benefit of Alice Springs; that is, the first substantial land release in a long time. I am proud of that. You can keep on carping, whining, swiping, and whatever, but we are a government that deals and negotiates with Aboriginal people for positive outcomes.

**Mr BURKE:** Yes, that is fine, minister. However, you will accept the fact that you have a very clear responsibility. You are the landlord, essentially, for the pastoral estate of the Northern Territory of the Crown land. Therefore, I would expect you to have a clear view, and a good understanding of what native title is, and what native title interest extends to.

**Dr BURNS:** I have a clearer view than the member for Macdonnell, who had this prosperous scheme about compulsory acquisition of the native title rights by this government over that particular land that would have tied the whole thing up for years, and given rise to all sorts of enmity, bad feelings, and a complete breakdown. That was the way the CLP did business in the past. That is not the way this government is going to do business. We will get a win for everyone on Larapinta, and it is great. There is going to be provision for first home buyers along with a great HomeNorth project which is a fantastic project, being widely launched. This is going to be a great thing for first home buyers. There will be some public housing in there. It is fantastic.

**Mr BURKE:** Good. Try to get yourself away from Larapinta for a second.

**Dr BURNS:** You are the one that took me there.

**Mr BURKE:** Yes, and now I am going to take you away from there. Let us get onto to native title, and native title interest. You just said then that to acquire that land would tie the land up in court for years.

**Dr BURNS:** To compulsorily acquire.

**Mr BURKE:** To compulsorily acquire. Tell me your understanding of compulsory acquisition under the *Native Title Act*.

**Dr BURNS:** My understanding is that, within a town area like that, there are mechanisms by which that can occur. I know the member for Macdonnell is the greatest bush lawyer in the world, but I have very solid legal and other advice. There was a timetable that was given to me by the Justice Department - who are real lawyers, not bush lawyers – which showed that it would tie this thing up for years.

Apart from that, as I have said before, there would be enmity. There would be a bad feeling or a revival of bad feeling that probably existed during the CLP time. We have gone down the path of negotiation. There is some small detail to be finalised, but I am extremely confident that development will occur within the next couple of months.

**Mr BURKE:** Can we get back to your answer? What is the process for compulsory acquisition under the *Native Title Act*?

**Dr BURNS:** I have given you my understanding. If you want a more detailed explanation, are you the man to do that, Mr Wharam?

**Mr WHARAM:** Paul Wharam, Director, Land Administration. The process is that, within a 'town' as defined under the *Native Title Act*, we can utilise the provisions of the *Lands Acquisition Act*, which is Territory legislation. Under that process, we serve a notice of proposal, we enter a consultation period and, if objections are received, it ends up before the Lands and Mining Tribunal constituted under the act. The tribunal makes a recommendation to the minister; the minister can then proceed to acquire, amend or disregard.

The timing in that process takes approximately 14 months. In experiences in the past, there have been appeals, and that happened at Timber Creek where we wanted to acquire land. The land council lodged an appeal through the courts, and that is still in process. That has taken over two years so far.

**Dr BURNS:** So, we are well over three years, are we, Mr Wharam? Is that what you are saying? It is somewhere between three to three-and-a-half years already on the time frame that you have just mentioned?

**Mr WHARAM:** Probably over two.

**Dr BURNS:** But you talked about a period of 14 months, and then an appeal period that is present in the Timber Creek case of being approximately how many years?

**Mr WHARAM:** Two years.

**Mr Baldwin:** All up, a bit over two years, minister.

**Dr BURNS:** Yes, so we are looking three or three-and-a-half years at least?

**Mr Baldwin:** No, all up.

**Mr BURKE:** Did any go through in about 14 months in accordance with the act, in your experience?

**Mr WHARAM:** Yes, there have been some.

**Mr BURKE:** Yes, okay. Minister, I just want to get to the bottom of what you consider native title interests are. Do you consider ...

**Dr BURNS:** It opens up the question of why, if you are advocating that process, the CLP government did not do that over Larapinta in the first place? That is a pretty good question.

**Mr Baldwin:** Did we have it under way?

**Dr BURNS:** What is that?

**Mr Baldwin:** Did we have it under way, do you know?

**Dr BURNS:** The only thing you had under way is division and wedge politics.

**Mr Baldwin:** Did we acquire any under the act?

**Mr BURKE:** Minister, can you tell whether or not you disagree with the fact that a native title interest does not mean that they own the land?

**Dr BURNS:** Look, I have already given that answer, member for Brennan.

**Mr BURKE:** No, you have not. I have asked you a pretty simple question.

**Dr BURNS:** I have already told you twice, and it is becoming repetitive. I am on the record with my reply. If you want to take the previous minister's statements out of context and twist and turn them, that is up to you. I have given a very direct answer to you on this issue: government has acted on the recognised legal native title findings of the Federal Court, and we have moved down the path of negotiation, not confrontation.

**Mr BURKE:** Well, if that is the case, in the term of this government, have you used the acquisition process of the *Native Title Act*?

**Dr BURNS:** Do you mean over native title? I am unsure. I would have to take advice about that, member for Brennan. I am advised that there was one instance in Timber Creek.

**Dr Lim:** Blushing there, minister!

**Ms Lawrie:** That is the one in court.

**Dr BURNS:** That is the one that is in court. I am unaware of the circumstances about that, member for Brennan, so I am unable to comment further on it.

**Mr BALDWIN:** You do use it when you feel like it?

**Dr BURNS:** Oh, well it is not a matter of feelings, member for Daly. I am someone who tries to weigh up the pros and cons of any position - no pun intended – and, basically, try and move forward in a consultative, measured way, and on the basis of legal advice. That is the way I try and fulfil my ministerial responsibilities

**Mr BURKE:** You might want to check pages 438 and 439 of the transcript of last year's estimates, and the comments of the previous minister. They are not being taken out of context; they are quite

definite statements of that minister's opinion of what native title constitutes. I am trying to ask you ...

**Dr BURNS:** Well, I am the minister now and I have given you my opinion - and very directly.

**Mr BURKE:** But you have not ...

**Dr BURNS:** I hope you find it acceptable.

**Mr BURKE:** But you do not agree with him?

**Dr BURNS:** The answer I have given is the answer I given.

**Mr BURKE:** Then you do agree with him?

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** Shadow, the minister has indicated that he feels he has answered the question to the best of his ability. That is it. We are into repetition.

**Mr BURKE:** I do not want to be repetitious, I want to move on. Are you aware of the questions I asked the Chief Minister, which fall into your area of responsibility as well, of managing the pastoral estate and the polygon claims that are occurring on exploration leases?

**Dr BURNS:** To be honest with you, member for Brennan, no, I am not aware of that.

**Mr BURKE:** Could I ask why not, as the lands minister?

**Dr BURNS:** Is this something that has happened within this estimates?

**Mr BURKE:** Well, as the lands minister ..

**Dr BURNS:** Is it something that you have asked during this estimates?

**Mr BURKE:** I have asked the Chief Minister a number of questions on native title claims as it affected pastoral leases and the impact of those claims on our parks, and the parks handover strategy. However, in terms of the claims on pastoral leases, that falls directly under your responsibility.

**Dr BURNS:** I am prepared to answer the question. I have to confess that I have been preparing in a detailed fashion for my appearance before this committee. I have not heard all the evidence that has been given, or read all the transcripts that have occurred to date. If it is pertinent to my portfolio area in this output area, I am more than willing to try and answer it, member for Brennan.

**Mr BURKE:** It is, and it refers to the management of the pastoral estate, and to this output area. What I am interested in is, firstly, what is the extent of the so-called polygon claims as they affect pastoral leases in the Northern Territory?

**Ms LAWRIE:** A point of clarification. Do they go to the exploration licence issue, because that is minister for mining.

**Mr BIGG:** Yes, it is really a matter for resource development.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** We will let the minister decide whether it is relevant.

**Dr BURNS:** Well, that is my advice. I would have to relay that to the committee.

**Mr BURKE:** I am frankly stunned, minister. I am stunned that you would think that that is not a land issue.

**Dr BURNS:** If Mr Bigg could relay what he just told me for the record, that might bring some clarity, member for Brennan.

**Mr BIGG:** The Department of Justice is providing advice to the minister for resource development on this issue, because they do relate to mining issues. As you know, the Department of Justice is very heavily involved in any issue relating to native title or Aboriginal land claims. As you know, they have an Aboriginal Lands Branch.

In this particular instance, the polygon claims relate mainly to mining issues, so the Department of Justice, and the Department of Business, Industry and Resource Development and their respective ministers are handling those issues,.

**Mr BURKE:** The first thing is, when I looked in the room this morning, I saw at least a couple of the experts on native title in the Northern Territory ...

**Dr BURNS:** From the Justice Department?

**Mr BURKE:** No here, siting in this room now.

**Dr BURNS:** Yes, but these sound like complex legal issues, member for Brennan.

**Mr BURKE:** No, they are not.

**Dr BURNS:** They are rightfully dealt within the Justice Department. I regularly ask for legal advice from the Justice Department. I rely very heavily on them, as the member for Daly would have done when he had the portfolio.

**Mr BALDWIN:** The people in the department I relied on a lot.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** Hang on. We have been advised that it does not belong to this portfolio. Clearly then, the minister cannot answer it ...

**A member** interjecting.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** No, it has been established. You have your answer. We are talking about time, let us move on to the rest of the portfolios.

**Mr BALDWIN:** All right. We will talk about tenants.

**Dr BURNS:** Talk about my what?

**Mr BALDWIN:** Tenants.

**Dr BURNS:** Which tenants?

**Mr BURKE:** Minister, would you accept that the pastoral lessees in the Northern Territory are you tenants, and you are the landlord?

**Dr BURNS:** Well, I am not sure of the legal definition of that.



**Mr BALDWIN:** Are you the landlord?

**Dr BURNS:** Yes, because the Crown is the landowner. However, I believe the Pastoral Lands Board comes into the equation as well.

**Mr BURKE:** The claims that are being put using the mechanism of the *Native Title Act* are called polygon claims because they follow the extent of the boundaries of the exploration licence being used. Because the nature of the use of the land is being changed from pastoral lease to a mining lease, the mechanism of the *Native Title Act* is now being used to establish a native title claim over those areas. Therefore, what you have is pastoralists who are now affected by native title claims over their pastoral land. Those native title claims are extensive. I would have thought that this department would have been intimately involved in the resolution of those issues.

**Dr BURNS:** Well, that may well be so, member for Brennan, but we have talked about portfolio responsibilities, which is something you should understand as an ex-Chief Minister and ex-minister.

**Mr BALDWIN:** Is someone coming to address it?

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** No, no, the minister has addressed it.

**Mr BALDWIN:** No, he did not.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** I do not want to ...

**Dr BURNS:** We will just leave it. It is not within our portfolio area. This is a highly technical legal issue.

**Mr BURKE:** God, minister! Highly technical legal issue ...

**Ms LAWRIE:** It is not within his portfolio area.

**Mr BURKE:** I am talking to the minister at the moment, not to you. A highly technical legal issue, I suggest to you, it is not. It is being dealt with by pastoralists every day of the week. There are 132 claims currently, either awaiting mediation, in mediation, or being referred to mediation. Every one of those native title claims are on pastoral leases of which you are the landlord - they are your tenants. These people who are trying to deal with those claims are, essentially, your tenants. They would expect you, as the minister, to be representing their interests. I wanted to know in terms of representing their interests, what are you doing about it? Simple.

**Dr BURNS:** Well, I am advised that pastoral leases co-exist with native title. I do not really want to comment any further. It is a highly technical legal issue; it belongs to another portfolio. Of course, I am vitally interested in it, member for Brennan, but I do not go trampling all over another portfolio area. Of course, I consult very closely with my Cabinet colleagues on every issue ...

**Mr BALDWIN:** You do not seem to know much about this one!

**Dr BURNS:** Well, you can pretend whatever you like, member for Daly!

**Mr BALDWIN:** You have demonstrated it.

**Dr BURNS:** Well, you might think so but, then again, you are a retiree.

**Mr BALDWIN:** Yeah! And glad to be!

**Dr BURNS:** Are you?

**Mr BALDWIN:** Yes, with idiots like you around.

**Dr BURNS:** I wonder what sort of business you are going to go into?

**Mr BALDWIN:** I do not know. You tell me. Have you got a job offer?

**Mr BURKE:** Minister, can I say that I really am disappointed. I am not going to pursue it now, because I am obviously wasting my time. However, I am really disappointed that the minister who is responsible for lands in the Northern Territory, and directly responsible for the management of those pastoral leases, has no bloody idea what is going on. You are dependant on ...

**Dr BURNS:** Well, that is your interpretation, member for Brennan, and you can ...

**Mr BURKE:** It is obvious that you have no idea ...

**Ms Lawrie:** No, that is not true.

**Mr Baldwin:** Glaringly obvious!

**Mr BURKE:** Absolutely obvious! Those cattlemen and those pastoralists out there who are hoping that through you, as their minister, they will get representation on some of the claims and the extent of those claims that are coming through, essentially, can put all of their faith in a couple of hidden lawyers in Justice Department. Well, that is great!

Can I go back to what your in-house legal advice is? Does any of your in-house legal advice deal with these issues?

**Dr BURNS:** What is that?

**Mr BURKE:** Does any of your in-house legal advice - this support area that is attending to those issue in the department – deal with these issues?

**Dr BURNS:** Mr Chambers will answer that.

**Mr CHAMBERS:** Our in-house Legal Services Unit is not constituted of lawyers. That was never the intent. It is just that we deal with a raft of legal issues. The intent was to avoid duplication of advice that is requested from all parts of the department. When an issue like this arises, we do not pretend to be lawyers and provide definitive in-house legal advice. Our principal source of advice is the Department of Justice or, if they think appropriate, that is outsourced.

**Dr BURNS:** I have to add, member for Brennan, as the former Primary Industries minister and now Lands minister, I have met regularly with the Northern Territory Cattlemen's Association. This certainly has not been an issue that they have raised with me as a high priority. They are concerned, as they rightly should be, with roads, exports, the Aussie dollar. I spent time with them over in Lampung in southern Sumatra last year with exporters, the Executive Officer of the Cattlemen's Association and departmental officers. The official organisation of the cattlemen in the Northern Territory have not raised this with me as a burning issue. I do not know what sort of dog whistling you are embarking on here. It is pretty transparent to me what you are on about.

**Mr Baldwin:** The dog is not coming.

**Dr BURNS:** No. It should not come, either, because we are all a bit more mature than that. There may be a certain section of the population who responds to that sort of call, but I am not going to

respond to it. Member for Brennan, it is a bit below you to be doing this.

**Mr BURKE:** After being given such fervent advice, I just say to you that my questions result from a direct representation from the Cattlemen's Association, with their consultants, who briefed me extensively on what was their No 1 issue; that is, the way these native title claims are affecting their rights, obligations and, in fact, their land on their pastoral leases.

They are extremely concerned that there are issues coming through that are attempting to create precedents under the *Native Title Act* using the mechanism of entry that has been created by the exploration leases that is not being attended to properly by government. Where it is being attended to, there are competing views as to what native title means. I would have thought that the representations that are happening with regard to native title, if not being done directly by your department, would certainly not be done by the Department of Justice on their own without reference and the close involvement of your department, because they are laying down positions to what native title means from the government position. And you are telling me you are not even aware of it.

**Dr BURNS:** You have made your point, member for Brennan.

**Mr BURKE:** Thank you. It is better than being patronised.

**Dr BURNS:** You have made it fairly repetitively and tediously. I suggest we move on.

**Mr BURKE:** We are moving on now, and it is a waste of time. I also assume you would not also be aware of the extent of these claims to community living areas? You might want to follow that up, too, because the extent of these claims are extending to establishing community living areas on pastoral leases again, which is creating great concern for the pastoralists who may find themselves having to pay for the infrastructure themselves. That is in the tribunal at the moment. It is all your land. I have no more questions.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** All right. Are there any more questions on this output?

**Mr WOOD:** I presume this is in the right place. Minister, you say that as regards to land management compliance, the statutory requirement is 100%.

**Dr BURNS:** What is that?

**Mr WOOD:** You say under Land Management Performance Measures, Quality, that compliance with statutory requirements is 100% and will be 100%. Minister, can I take it that every piece of Crown land has a firebreak on it, which is a statutory requirement?

**Ms Lawrie:** Page 238.

**Mr WOOD:** Page 238, yes. Basically, I am asking: does the department make sure that all its Crown lands has adequate firebreaks.

**Dr BURNS:** Mr Bigg.

**Mr BIGG:** That particular performance measure that relates to conforming with the statutory time frames - and, obviously, with the requirements of legislation, everyone would want 100% and would not accept anything less. In terms of your direct question: does that performance measure mean that every piece of Crown land has a firebreak - obviously not, because it does not relate to that.

**Mr WOOD:** So, it is not a statutory requirement to have a firebreak - or am I misreading it?

**Mr BIGG:** Yes, I am just saying that performance measure is not referring to firebreaks on Crown

land.

**Mr WOOD:** It is difficult to say what that means from just reading that line. Okay.

**Dr BURNS:** Member for Nelson, we have tightened up some of the provisions, I suppose, in ensuring that property owners do have firebreaks. I would be hoping that Crown land would be part of it. Do you have a block of land that is ...

**Mr WOOD:** Yes, yes, and I rang the man this morning to make sure that it gets done again.

**Dr BURNS:** Do you want to tell us where that block of land is?

**Mr WOOD:** You can check my interests there - at Adelaide River.

**Dr BURNS:** Adelaide River? Which block of Crown land there are you talking about?

**Mr WOOD:** No, no. I do not own Crown land.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** Not in your own electorate!

**Mr WOOD:** I do live in my own electorate. You can own land outside of your electorate. Not sure what that has to do with the price of fish, anyway.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** I am not sure what any of this has to do with the price of fish. That concludes consideration of Output 1.4.

#### **Output 1.5 – Land Development**

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** The committee will now consider output 1.5. Shadow minister, any questions?

**Mr BURKE:** No questions.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** Committee? That concludes consideration of Output 1.5. That also concludes consideration of Output Group 1.0 ...

**Dr BURNS:** 3.1?

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** No, 1.0

**Ms LAWRIE:** The entire 1.0 - Land Planning, Development and Management in entirety.

**Dr BURNS:** Oh, I see.

**Mr WOOD:** We have never done that before, Mr Chairman.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** Land development?

**Mr WOOD:** No, 1.0 you are looking at. What did you say?

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** I said we have now concluded all of Output Group 1.0.

**Mr BALDWIN:** All of 1 - 1.0 through to 1.5.

**Mr WOOD:** All right, I presume it is done. I thought he was asking for a comment on 1.0.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** Okay, you know where we are?

**Mr WOOD:** I know where we are.

#### **OUTPUT GROUP 2.0 – Environment and Heritage**

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** I would like to note for the committee and the minister and officers present that questions on Output Group 2 will be addressed by minister Scrymgour on Thursday, 24 June 2004.

I have one piece of housekeeping here. The time is now 11.38 am and, for the purpose of the *Hansard* record, I wish to advise that pursuant to section 12 of the Terms of Reference of the Estimates Committee, Madam Speaker has nominated the member for Brennan to replace the member for Drysdale.

I would also like to place on the record that the members for Brennan and Daly are interchanging across the committee from their shadow portfolio responsibilities to members of the committee. Therefore, for the duration, both will be able to ask questions as a shadow minister or as a member of the panel.

#### **OUTPUT GROUP 3.0 – Conservation and Natural Resource Management Output 3.1 - Policy and Planning**

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** The committee will now move to Output Group 3.0, Conservation and Natural Resource Management, and consider Output 3.1, Policy and Planning. Shadow for Parks and Wildlife.

**Mr BALDWIN:** Thank you, Mr Chairman. I will move straight into it. I will try to be quick through this whole section of outputs because we have a fair way to go. Minister, has any funding or resources such as personnel been provided in the 2003-04 budget to land councils from your department - from that division or from the department?

**Dr BURNS:** My advice is that we do not think so. Are you aware of anything, Mr Tinkham?

**Mr TINKHAM:** No, not at all.

**Dr BURNS:** There is an officer on secondment to the – which land council? Identify yourself, please.

**Dr RITCHIE:** David Ritchie, Executive Director, Conservation and Natural Resources. Shadow minister, we have just in the last couple of months had one of our planners with the Central Land Council and one with the Northern Land Council to work with them on the Parks and Reserves master plan.

**Mr BALDWIN:** Minister, for what duration will they be on secondment with them?

**Dr RITCHIE:** Shadow minister, we have initially said a three-month period, and we will review it after three months.

**Mr BALDWIN:** Just to clarify, minister, that is two offices, one to CLC and one to NLC?

**Dr BURNS:** I believe so, member for Daly.

**Mr BALDWIN:** Okay. Minister, can you describe the role Parks and Wildlife was playing in the government's offer to hand over parks to traditional owners? That is the legislation that is before ...

**Dr BURNS:** Well, you keep on talking about handovers.

**Mr BALDWIN:** Well, you put it in your words?

**Dr BURNS:** This is about joint management; enlarging the parks estate; a native title decision that was handed down in Western Australia, as you well know. Stop trying to brand it as a handover of parks. It is not that. You are whistling again, but you are whistling against the breeze.

**Mr BALDWIN:** What role will your department be playing in that?

**Dr BURNS:** Well, I will give it to Mr Ritchie...

**Mr BALDWIN:** Do you know, minister?

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** The minister has advised ...

**Mr Baldwin:** No, I am happy with that.

**Dr BURNS:** I will place it on the record here, because I know where the member for Daly is going. My department, and the officer here, Dr Ritchie, have played an integral part in the development of the master plan and the framework. Here is someone who is very experienced in this whole issue - someone who used to head up the Sacred Sites Authority of the Northern Territory, with an anthropological background, who is a great public servant. He is playing an integral role there. If you are suggesting, member for Daly, that somehow we are not involved, well, think again.

**Mr BALDWIN:** I was asking you the question what you thought of your role. But, anyway, I am happy to hear from Dr Ritchie.

**Dr BURNS:** Well, I have a very important role in this, member for Daly, and I am considering these issues very carefully. I am not someone who comes into Cabinet with a whole lot of stuff under my arm and asks everyone to else sign off for me, as I am told that you used to do.

**Mr BALDWIN:** Who told you that?

**Dr BURNS:** You could not even make a decision. They used to call you 'top-drawer Tim'. They opened the top drawer - 'Oh, there are all the files'. I am someone who takes his role very seriously, member for Daly.

**Mr BALDWIN:** Yes, you sit over there in the corner and keep thinking. I will hear from Dr Ritchie.

**Dr RITCHIE:** Shadow minister, we, as the Parks Service charged with the management of all parks and reserves, will continue in that role as the government's representative in any joint management arrangement between the Territory and the traditional owners of any parks and reserves that are handed back, and then leased back under the new Parks and Reserves Framework for the Future. Arrangements: to elaborate, our role has been to check that any agreements are doable, and that any new structures that are proposed for the joint plans of management are the sorts of arrangements that, in a collective experience, the Parks and Wildlife Service feel would not only be workable, but will actually carry with them improvements.

**Dr BURNS:** We are willing to take questions here. However, properly, this particular issue should be under Output area 3.2. If you want to discuss it now, I suppose it is interlinked to some degree. I am not going to stand in your way. I am just pointing out that it is not in the correct output area. However, let us continue with the questioning.

**Mr BALDWIN:** Well, one would have thought that policy is directed and articulated through legislation,

minister, and this is a piece of legislation ...

**Dr BURNS:** There is also management.

**Mr BALDWIN:** This is policy and planning. Minister, can you give us a quick understanding of what you understand the legislation is offering?

**Dr BURNS:** The Chief Minister made this plain during the introduction and passing of the legislation. There were a number of times during Question Time when quite preposterous suggestions were put forward that we would have humpies up the top of Wangi Falls, and all the nay-saying of the opposition. However, I am actually looking forward to this agenda because it will be a partnership between Aboriginal people and Parks. It will be an incredible boost for tourism because, as we know, a lot of people come to the Territory to learn more about indigenous culture and to hear the stories that Aboriginal people have about their country. It is those stories - and I am sure the member for Daly will agree with me - that really bring a lot of these areas to life in a very special way.

I am proud to say I am going to a launch of Bill Harney's book at the Administrator's house tomorrow. I was very privileged to have a Lightning Brothers tour by Bill Harney. What a fantastic Territorian that man is, and what a repository of knowledge!

Furthermore, this agenda will actually bring more land into the parks estate that people can enjoy. It is a plus, plus, plus, win, win, win all the way around, and I am very proud of it.

**Mr BALDWIN:** Does that mean, minister, that you do not know what the offer encompasses, because you have not answered?

**Mr BURKE:** Talk about bloody waffling!

**Dr BURNS:** Well, these negotiations have been ongoing for some time, and I believe that they are drawing to a conclusion. It is not my place to say here what the outcome of those negotiations are. Basically, they have been handled in good faith by both sides and in goodwill - something that this government has been able to manage that you could never manage.

**Mr BALDWIN:** Have you read the legislation, because that is where it articulates the offer? I am trying to get your understanding of what that offer is.

**Dr BURNS:** I am like you, I am a parliamentarian. I am a member of the Legislative Assembly and, of course, I read legislation that comes before us.

**Mr BALDWIN:** Okay, minister. As one of the major stakeholders in all of this, do you know what the cost will be to Territorians if this offer of your government is taken up?

**Dr BURNS:** You are coming back to that some old hoary nut that you have come back to before. This ...

**Mr BALDWIN:** That is because it is the appropriation. We are talking money. I want to know costs. Is it in your budget for this next financial year?

**Dr BURNS:** As much as you are able, Dr Ritchie, are you able to clarify this question for the member for Daly?

**Dr RITCHIE:** In this 2004-05 budget, we have \$2.35m identified for both doing the parks and reserves conservation master plan, and for beginning to implement the Framework for the Future parks agenda. To give an overview of that, we are looking at probably spending about \$1m of that on actual implementation, which is the meetings and the actual setting up of the joint management structures;

approximately \$1m of it again on employment of indigenous people directly; and then the balance of that is on the actual development and finalisation of the actual plans themselves - that is both the master plan and the first of the joint management plans.

**Dr BURNS:** The major element of these negotiations, member for Daly, has been about Territory title, which has been a big part of it. It has been an exchange of goodwill, and I am very proud that Aboriginal people have come to the table, and a lot of them have embraced this process. Wouldn't you say so, Dr Ritchie? If you could respond.

**Dr RITCHIE:** Well, even before the final deal has been done, you are quite right. There has been a change in the relationships with indigenous groups right across the parks estate.

**Mr BALDWIN:** Minister, under your budget banner of lifestyle, would you say that this initiative of government is going to be a good thing for lifestyle in the Territory?

**Dr BURNS:** Yes, because it opens up more land in the parks estate, it enlivens and invigorates the parks estate, and it certainly provides opportunities for employment for Aboriginal people - some of them in quite remote areas - offering the sort of support and interpretation that only indigenous people from those areas can offer. It is fantastic, so it is a win/win.

**Mr BALDWIN:** If that is the case then, in the whole raft of budget books which you know are very extensive, can you show me where it is highlighted in those budget books? Is it in *Budget Highlights*, is it in - which one is it in? *Capital Works*?

**Dr BURNS:** Well, I have highlighted it to you, member for Daly.

**Mr BALDWIN:** No, in the books. Could you point to where it is in the books, that you have highlighted and made an issue of it for ...

**Dr BURNS:** Obviously, the implementation of the parks master plan, as you have pointed out yourself, runs across a number of budget areas. This is a matrix we are talking about here, member for Daly.

**Mr BALDWIN:** So it is not highlighted? How many of your other parks and reserves in the entire parks and reserves estate are not going to be affected by the government's legislation of the offer?

**Dr BURNS:** Approximately 50, I am informed.

**Mr BALDWIN:** Why were they not included in the offer?

**Dr BURNS:** I will let Dr Ritchie offer that explanation.

**Dr RITCHIE:** Shadow minister, numerically there are a lot of small reserves that we felt, in consultation with the Department of Chief Minister, it was not appropriate to put them into an offer for joint management just because of the sorts of reasons that they exist - ranging from the Telegraph Stations to little reserves for protecting individual species, etcetera. In broad terms, I think there is about 35% of the parks estate managed by Parks and Wildlife Service involved in the joint management offer.

As you know, the initial offer was designed to remove some of the major impediments of parks management, particularly the ongoing native title claims and legal - that is, the 11 claims that were found to be afoot under ALRA - and the sunset claims, which create problems for us, from a management point of view, because of section 67A of the *Aboriginal Lands Right (Northern Territory) Act*. You will find that of all the parks in the three schedules in the *Parks and Reserves (Framework for the Future) Act*, we believe in the vast majority of them a strong native title case exists, or would



be found to exist, and that there are also sunset claims or real live ALRA claims on it.

**Mr BALDWIN:** So, minister, of those other 50 not included in the offer, are any of those affected or impacted on by native title interest?

**Dr BURNS:** Dr Ritchie.

**Dr RITCHIE:** It is generally assumed that some of that land is held by the Conservation Land Corporation, and some of it is held by the Northern Territory Land Corporation. If you're just talking from a legal point of view, it is assumed that native title – there is no legal impediment arising from the form of title to extinguish it. So, we assume that it could exist. The ones that were targeted for this particular deal were the ones where we were sure that not only could it exist, but there were native title holders who would be able to actively pursue claims.

**Mr BALDWIN:** So, how will the native title be dealt with on the ones that are outside of the offer?

**Dr BURNS:** In terms of native title, our first job is to negotiate these larger parks. What you're talking about here, member for Daly, is really much smaller parts of land, and they will be dealt with in course. Dr Ritchie.

**Dr RITCHIE:** Shadow minister, as you know - I am sure you're aware - native title becomes a real issue when we are proposing to do new things with the area, with the park. You can run the park, so long as you do not wish to stop people shooting in a particular area, or lighting fires, or you do not want to build a tourist infrastructure or a road. Just the management of the biodiversity is not incompatible with native title, generally speaking. Again, the areas that have been identified by this deal are the major parks where we believe that it is important to have both those sunset ALRA claims and native title dealt with through an ILUA, so that we can do those kind of developments that are essential for opening up the parks for recreation and tourist development.

For most of the other ones, the answer simply is, for the balance that are not part of this deal, we will have to deal with them on a case-by-case basis and seek ILUAs, if we do need to do something like build a boat ramp. If not, we will do our fire, feral, weeds management, and probably we will not need to do anything.

**Mr BALDWIN:** So, minister, would you consider any of those 50 that we are talking about that are outside the offer to be major parks?

**Dr BURNS:** I do not have the list in front of me, member for Daly. This whole process of negotiation over the parks master plan has been quite complex, on quite a large scale and quite detailed. I do not know what you class as a major park. Maybe you should tell me.

**Mr BALDWIN:** Okay. Let me - Charles Darwin National Park. Is that a major park?

**Dr BURNS:** It might be considered to be that by some.

**Mr BALDWIN:** Right. We have some major parks outside of the offer. Why were they not included in the offer?

**Dr BURNS:** I suppose at one stage, government just has to make a decision about what is in and what is out. You might say it is arbitrary, but that is the way it is, member for Daly.

**Mr BALDWIN:** No, I will say you said it is arbitrary.

**Dr BURNS:** I did not. I said that you said it was arbitrary.

**Mr BALDWIN:** Well, okay. Whatever you want, minister.

**Dr BURNS:** Are you saying that I said it was arbitrary? I am lost.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** Shall we clarify that for the record?

**Mr BALDWIN:** In terms of the Charles Darwin National Park, what will you do in respect of the native title interest there, as an example of major parks?

**Dr BURNS:** You are always trying to find problems, member for Daly.

**Mr BALDWIN:** No. If they exist, I want to know what you are going to do about it.

**Dr BURNS:** I would be more worried about the midges there than anything else.

**Ms Lawrie:** Dingoes.

**Dr BURNS:** Dingoes.

**Members** interjecting.

**Mr BALDWIN:** Did you answer the question?

**Mr Burke:** No, he does not want to answer you.

**Mr BALDWIN:** No, okay. That is all the questions I have on this output.

**Dr BURNS:** No, no. You are imputing a non-answer to me, member for Brennan, and it is not a non-answer.

**Mr Baldwin:** Well, we are waiting for the answer.

**Mr Burke:** We only got as far as Katherine region, so we thought we would move on.

**Dr BURNS:** I am just receiving advice. I am advised that Charles Darwin Park is part of a current native title claim.

**Mr BALDWIN:** How is that being dealt with, minister?

**Dr BURNS:** I suppose that has been dealt with through the process.

**Mr BALDWIN:** Not suppose. How is it that - this is your estate. This is your estate.

**Dr BURNS:** Through the court, and that is where we did not want to be because your approach in the past can be - you name it, it is in the court. Give the lawyers \$25m, tie it up for 20 years. That is the way you do business. You paralyse everything.

**Mr BALDWIN:** No, you are the minister and you are in government. This is you doing it, minister. This is you doing it.

**Dr BURNS:** I am not paralysed. I make decisions. I am not paralysed.

**Mr BALDWIN:** Can I just clarify, minister, with you in the case of Charles Darwin, which I used as an example ...

**Dr BURNS:** I have already spoken about Charles Darwin.

**Mr BALDWIN:** That is in the court, and government is litigating its case in the court?

**Dr BURNS:** That is the way things are.

**Mr BALDWIN:** Thank you. That is all the questions I have for this output.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** Are there any more questions on this output?

**Mr WOOD:** Minister, under Performance Measures, you talk about regional natural resource development strategies established or reviewed. What strategies have been done?

**A Witness:** Again, I think there was Ti Tree Basin, Mary River and Darwin Harbour Plan of Management.

**Mr WOOD:** Minister, you talked about COAG Water Reform Agenda milestones achieved 100% and Legislative and Policy Reviews completed within, I presume, those agreed milestones. Can you say what our agreement was under the COAG Water Reform Agenda?

**Dr BURNS:** It is a very important agenda. Water is very important in the Northern Territory, and we do not want to over exploit our water resource. However, we do know that in southern states they are envious of our water resources. We only have to look at the Murray-Darling Basin and beyond. It is important for us to be part of the COAG agenda. I will let Dr Ritchie follow up on that answer.

**Dr RITCHIE:** Mr Wood, we have been part of COAG Water Reform, and I believe the initiative will be considered on 25 June. It may result in a change in the assessment process from then on. However, up to this point, we have been 100% compliant with it.

**Mr WOOD:** Thank you.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** Any more questions on that output? There being no questions, that concludes consideration of output 3.1.

### **Output 3.2 – Parks and Reserves Management**

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** The committee will now consider Output 3.2, Parks and Reserves Management. Shadow minister, do you have any questions?

**Mr BALDWIN:** Yes, I do. What is the establishment strength of uniform ranger staff in parks across the Northern Territory?

**Dr BURNS:** I defer to Dr Ritchie on that one.

**Dr RITCHIE:** Across the whole of the Northern Territory, I think ...

**Mr BALDWIN:** This is uniformed ranger staff.

**Dr RITCHIE:** Rangers. I might have to do a bit of arithmetic for you on this. Just bear with me, unless Mr Bigg can give it faster than I can. 156. I will take his word for it.

**Mr BALDWIN:** 156. Is that the establishment level or is that the amount of personnel currently in

uniform?

**Dr RITCHIE:** I am not sure what you mean by the question.

**Dr BURNS:** I will call on Mr Chambers.

**Mr CHAMBERS:** Barry Chambers. To add a bit of clarification to the issue of establishment levels. These are a bit of a myth in many areas, in the sense that an agency can only really employ the number of people that it is funded to do. As chief executive, it is my job to actually ensure that we employ only as many people as can be funded. Therefore, whether you have an organisational chart that has 100 positions on it - 200, or whatever - it does not really matter because the reality is that you can only move to staffing levels that can be funded.

Essentially, at this stage of the year, our personnel expenditure right across the department is just about on line. We have maximised the amount of employment that we have within the department, and that extends to all areas of the department, up and down. However, in any individual part of the department, from day to day, there are ups and downs; people come and go. We have a target, I guess, for staffing levels in each area. The word 'establishment' implies some more rigid number than in fact really exists in the management of an agency.

**Mr BALDWIN:** Thanks, Mr Chambers. Minister, then could you tell me if the 156 is the target level of staffing for uniformed rangers?

**Dr BURNS:** I would have to defer to Dr Ritchie on this. I take the opportunity to commend our rangers for the work they do, sometimes in isolated regions, and for taking on new work. At Leanyer Recreation Park, a fantastic initiative of this government which is very popular, there are extra rangers there as well. We are meeting need. These people are very flexible, they are very well qualified and they have a real love and passion for their job. I will defer to Dr Ritchie on this issue.

**Dr RITCHIE:** There has been a slight increase in the number of uniformed rangers. We anticipate that that is going to go up significantly as we bring on more staff out of the \$2.3m I was talking about. \$1m of that will be spent, basically, employing uniformed rangers.

**Mr BALDWIN:** So, is the current level of 156 personnel on the ground in uniform?

**Dr RITCHIE:** I am taking Bill's word; I did not add that up. In Bill's area, which is park management, we currently have in this year, 188 staff in all, which means that by the time you have taken some of the management out, sounds right to me.

**Mr BALDWIN:** Correct me, minister, if I am wrong here. There is T3 and T4, the way I understand it, in Rangers. Are there lower categories as well?

**Dr RITCHIE:** Shadow minister, there are a lot of people employed in the professional stream in rangers now, as we have new people in. So, we have got Ps, Ts ...

**Mr BALDWIN:** You have the technicals and the Ps. Okay. In a synopsis then, all positions are filled with uniformed park rangers, minister? Is that right? I know you have a target, and you are saying it is flexible, but currently everything is at target level?

**Dr BURNS:** Well, I can only rely on the advice that I get from my officers, member for Daly, as you well understand.

**Mr BALDWIN:** That is why I am asking you.

**Mr CHAMBERS:** Basically, the answer is yes. My job, really, is to overview each of these positions to

ensure that we are not breaking out and blowing the budget, because we would be equally criticised for doing that as for underspending it. It is a matter of optimising. We have encouraged a heavy recruitment program there. As Dr Ritchie pointed out, there are an increasing number of professional people coming into play in that area, which is really lifting the overall level in that area. That is not to say that many of the people at a technical level do not have long experience and are excellent rangers. However, increasingly, we are seeing young professionals wanting to become a ranger.

**Mr BALDWIN:** Thank you, Mr Chambers. Minister, your budget highlights some capital funding for Gregory and Limmen Parks, in the order of \$0.5m each. Can you tell me what other capital works are being allocated across the other park estates, out of the rest of a parks?

**Dr BURNS:** I would have to defer here, but I know the one at Gregory has upgraded the boat ramp. I will be taking the opportunity in early August to go out and have a good look around Limmen Park ...

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** Are you taking the member for Nelson through the traffic lights?

**Dr BURNS:** Oh, no, it is a bit further than ...

**Mr WOOD:** No, I know Gregory National Park.

**Dr BURNS:** Basically, Limmen is also a place that I would like to go and visit. I commend the former member for Katherine, who told me that he was a prime mover in the establishment of Limmen Park. I am led to believe that it is a fantastic area. As minister, it is probably one of the more enjoyable parts of the job to get around and see our great parks estate. However, in terms of other infrastructure, I will defer to Dr Ritchie.

**Dr RITCHIE:** You are quite right, the main work is in Gregory, which is Victoria River Gorge, which is pedestrian boat ramps - also at Lost City, Butterfly Springs and the Towns River. The other work that is of note in the minor new works budget is another \$1m which includes work at Chambers Pillar, Leanyer, upgrading the George Brown Botanic Gardens, and the interpretive displays at Nitmiluk, Gregory, Big Horse and Big Horse campground.

**Dr BURNS:** Some of those are in your electorate, aren't they, member for Daly?

**Mr BALDWIN:** I know which ones are in my electorate.

**Dr BURNS:** Fantastic.

**Mr BALDWIN:** Is that the extent of the capital works across the parks estate?

**Dr BURNS:** Well, Dr Ritchie has given his answer, and there are some good developments there. Government has signalled that, with the implementation of the master plan, we would be looking to do a whole range of things in partnership in those parks. Given the master plan, it also opens up the way for major investors like Voyagers and others to set up infrastructure in our parks. It is all positive for our parks, member for Daly.

**Mr BALDWIN:** Well, that may be so, minister. For instance, you would be very much aware of the problems that are occurring at Mataranka with bats, and that you have been approached regarding the other area for visitors there at Bitter Springs. Whilst that has been opened under a former government and it is an enjoyable place, it was always envisaged - and I know your parks people would have liked to have seen some extension of work there. Have you given any consideration to alleviating some of the problems at the hot springs, and further developing Bitter Springs? Is there anything in your ...

**Dr BURNS:** In terms of bats?

**Mr BALDWIN:** ... works programs - is what I am asking – no, for increasing the visitor enjoyment at Bitter Springs, for instance?

**Dr BURNS:** Not that I am aware of, member for Daly.

**Mr BALDWIN:** Are you aware of the correspondence that has come to you regarding Bitter Springs?

**Dr BURNS:** Oh yes - about that and the bats. I suppose in budgets and funding, it is not an endless piece of string, a bottomless bucket, and we have to prioritise things. I would have thought showcasing and providing easier boat access at the Gregory National Park is a fantastic project. I do not recall you, as local member, writing to me about this. I recall the CEO of the local Mataranka Shire corresponding with me about it.

**Mr BALDWIN:** Did he cc it to me, minister?

**Dr BURNS:** What is that?

**Mr BALDWIN:** Did he cc it to me?

**Dr BURNS:** Oh, he might have cc'd it. I do not think you have written.

**Mr BALDWIN:** Then there is no need for me to write to you as well.

**Dr BURNS:** I am just trying to remember the last time you wrote to me in any portfolio area.

**Mr Burke:** There is no need for that, Chris, come on. Trying to impress your staff will not get you far, mate.

**Dr BURNS:** I am just trying to think, maybe they are all still in the top drawer.

**Mr BALDWIN:** Yes, could be. Minister, could you provide me with a breakdown - I am happy for you to table it and not go through it - of the visitor numbers of each of our Territory parks for 2002-03 or 2003-04 to date?

**Dr BURNS:** Of course, I am. I am not sure whether we have that information here to table but, if not ...

**Mr BALDWIN:** I am happy if it is tabled at a later date.

**Dr BURNS:** We are in the process of compiling 2003-04. Is that what you are saying, Dr Ritchie?

**Dr RITCHIE:** Shadow minister, bear with me,

**Mr BURKE:** Gee, you are right across it, Chris.

**Dr BURNS:** Do you expect me to know the visitor numbers of every park?

**Mr BURKE:** You do not know anything.

**Dr BURNS:** Well, that is your assertion.

**Mr BURKE:** All you ever do is give smart arse statements

**Dr BURNS:** No, that is your assertion. You are just being crude and just trying to bully me here now. I have my way of administering my ministry. It might not suit you, but then a lot of things have not suited you. Brighten up.

**Dr RITCHIE:** Shadow minister, I can give you know the 2002-03 figure, which is just across the whole of the parks estate, which is 3 030 000-odd. Usually these take a while to get compiled as they come in from all the parks. So we will know the 2003-04 figure in July or early August.

**Mr BALDWIN:** All right. Minister, could I ask you to table ...

**Dr BURNS:** I will undertake that, when they come to hand, I will write to you about that.

**Mr BALDWIN:** Broken up into each park.

**Dr BURNS:** Is that possible to disaggregate like that?

**Dr RITCHIE:** Yes, it is.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** I think we need to take that as a question ...

**Dr BURNS:** Yes, happy to take it. But it may be a few months.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** Is that a question on notice?

**Mr BALDWIN:** Yes, yes I am happy to put it on notice.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** To assist Hansard and to ensure the minister is fully aware of the question would the shadow minister please restate the question?

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#### **Question on Notice**

**Mr BALDWIN:** Minister, could you provide me with a breakdown of visitor numbers for each of the Territory parks for 2002-03 and 2003-04 when they come to hand?

**Dr BURNS:** Yes, my pleasure, member for Daly.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** That being the case, I allocate No 7.2 for that particular question.

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**Mr BALDWIN:** Minister, next question, and I am happy to put this on notice because it may require a bit of work. I just flag that at the front. Could you tell me how much it costs, from the government's and your department's point of view, to run the Nitmiluk National Park; Gurig National Park; and Litchfield National Park?

**Dr BURNS:** Does this include the cost of the boards also?

**Mr BALDWIN:** All costs including lease costs, lease payments, board management fees, personnel and all of that.

**Dr BURNS:** I will certainly take it on notice, member for Daly. I would imagine that information would

be in the annual report, but if you want to put our public servants to more work, rather than have yourself do it, well ...

**Mr Burke:** Yes, please

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** Are you saying that it is in the annual report and, therefore, it should ...

**Mr BALDWIN:** No, he is taking it on notice.

**Dr BURNS:** No, I am prepared to take it on notice. There is a library downstairs but ...

**Mr BALDWIN:** Don't put words in his mouth.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** Shadow minister, if I want to seek clarification before I take a question on notice, then I will do that. To assist Hansard and to ensure that the minister is fully aware of the question, would the shadow minister please restate the question?

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### Question on Notice

**Mr BALDWIN:** Minister, would you please provide me details, including all costs by the Northern Territory government regarding the operation of Nitmiluk National Park, Gurig National Park and Litchfield National Park?

**Dr BURNS:** I accept that question. I have just been made aware that there may be some data to hand on that. Is that correct, Dr Ritchie?

**Dr RITCHIE:** Minister, you could work it out from this, but this is broken down a lot lower than that. We could probably get, if you want it, by the break. We can have a look and do some adding.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** That being the case I allocate number 7.3 to this particular question.

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**Mr BALDWIN:** That finishes me in the that area of parks and reserves management, Mr Chairman.

### Output 3.2 – Parks and Reserves Management

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** Committee, we are on output 3.2 Parks and Reserves Management. Are there any questions?

**Mr WOOD:** Yes. Minister, you have \$70 000 down for a parks master plan ...

**Dr BURNS:** Hold on. We are in 3.3, is that right?

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** No, number 3.2.

**Dr BURNS:** Oh! Sorry.

**Mr WOOD:** Parks and Reserves Management. At page 16 in *Regional Highlights*, there is '\$70 000 for Parks Master Plan - biodiversity hot spots and irreplaceability'. Can you tell us what that is all about?



**Dr BURNS:** It is pretty evident, but I will defer to Dr Ritchie.

**Mr WOOD:** I thought you could answer that yourself when you said that.

**Dr BURNS:** You are pretty irreplaceable.

**Dr RITCHIE:** Member for Nelson, it is in reference to the parks master plan process. You have probably recently seen some advertisements of the public hearings on that. It is probably worth noting here that this master plan is not just about the parks estate, which is a relatively small percentage of the Territory; it is a conservation and parks master plan. It is a conservation plan for the whole of the Northern Territory, hence the reference to biodiversity hot spots. The whole concept of that is to try and identify areas of the Territory with particularly high concentrations of biodiversity.

**Dr BURNS:** There has been some work done by the Commonwealth on biodiversity hot spots, although I would have to say it seems to occur more in marginal electorates than anywhere else. Therefore, we are carrying out our own.

**Mr WOOD:** Minister, '\$81 000 direct expenditure on protecting environment' also in *Regional Highlights*, is a fairly broad statement. What does it mean? I will take that on notice if you do not have the answer.

**Dr BURNS:** I will take it on notice.

**Mr WOOD:** I just want to save time.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** All right. To assist Hansard, and to ensure that the minister is fully aware of the question, would the member for Nelson please restate the question?

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#### Question on Notice

**Mr WOOD:** Minister, in *Regional Highlights* at page 16, it states there will be '\$81 000 direct expenditure on protecting the environment'. Could you explain what that expenditure is about?

**Dr BURNS:** Yes, I am pleased to take that on notice.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** That being the case, I allocate number 7.4 to the question.

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**Mr WOOD:** My last question: in the same *Regional Highlights*, there is \$500 000 to manage Leanyer water park. Is that ongoing management costs? Could you also tell us how much Leanyer water park has cost since the government ...

**Dr BURNS:** Is that including the infrastructure works?

**Mr WOOD:** Yes.

**Dr BURNS:** That is a very good question, member for Nelson. That Leanyer water park is a fantastic asset for people in the northern suburbs and elsewhere. I must commend the members for Sanderson and Karama for their – the member for Karama is looking at me - principally the member for Karama. She really pushed this along with the member for Sanderson.

That \$500 000, I believe, is to cover extra personnel. To begin with, speaking euphemistically, there were hygiene issues. There are also indemnity issues regarding water safety. When you have big

groups of kids and families there, some do act irresponsibly. However, I commend the parks personnel for the work that they have done there. When I got this portfolio, I was quite worried about issues like that at Leanyer, but it has settled down to a great degree, and it is a great accomplishment of the staff. In the actual infrastructure spend, you are talking about over the past two financial years, I take it?

**Mr WOOD:** Since you started the refurbishing of it.

**Dr BURNS:** We have put several million dollars into it. Basically, that money continues to employ qualified staff to meet Royal Life Saving Society of Australia standards, involves the recruitment and training of casual lifeguard staff to provide extra staffing coverage for peak visitation periods such as school holidays, and allocating ranger staff within existing parks resources. Maintenance of water standards is a very important aspect of that, as well as security.

Member for Nelson, do you just mean the Leanyer Recreation Park, or are you also talking about the wonderful skateboard facility that has been built nearby?

**Mr WOOD:** Does it all come under your portfolio?

**Dr BURNS:** It does.

**Mr WOOD:** Well, I was after the total cost.

**Dr BURNS:** We are endeavouring to get you an answer here. \$3.606m is the upgrade for Leanyer park. That was the capital component. I am not sure whether there has been some extra shade put there as well, but we are always looking to improve the amusements, the furniture for the kids - they love it, the parents love it. So, \$3.6m was the infrastructure. In terms of the \$500 000, did you want to comment on that, Dr Ritchie?

**Dr RITCHIE:** Member for Nelson, that is based on an estimate for running it since Christmas time. Basically, we are employing three lifeguards at a time on-site, from a pool of six - two rangers at a time. We have outsourced the security, the pool maintenance, and also the cleaning. We are confident that all that comes to around about \$500 000.

**Mr WOOD:** That is for six months?

**Dr RITCHIE:** No, for the full year, so it was \$250 000 for the half year.

**Mr WOOD:** So that would be roughly the normal budget to run that?

**Dr RITCHIE:** Yes.

**Mr WOOD:** Including things like chemicals?

**Dr RITCHIE:** That is right.

**Dr BURNS:** There have been proposals for expressions of interest for taking over the park. It is a free park, that is the first thing to say, and we are committed to that. Secondly, I suppose there are only so many cans of soft drink that you can sell, so it is something we have to look at. However, we are committed to that park and I know the people of the northern suburbs and Darwin generally love it; they turn up in droves.

**Ms LAWRIE:** Plenty of rural people down there.

**Mr WOOD:** Well, perhaps the minister for sport can give you that \$1m that is sitting out there for a pool and you could develop one under your Parks and Wildlife management for the rural area. Thank you, Mr Chairman.

**Ms LAWRIE:** Rural families go to Leanyer all the time.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** I am sure they have gone ahead with the Olympic pool and it will open. When you start rating people out there, member for Nelson.

**Mr WOOD:** I do not know what that comment was about, Mr Chairman. Rural people pay rates, and some people pay substantial rates.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** All right. Are there any more questions under that output?

**Mr BURKE:** With relation to Leanyer Recreation Park, can you tell me how many times it has been forced to close since it first opened?

**Dr BURNS:** I am not sure about that. As I said, the whole issue of hygiene was a concern of mine when I first took on the portfolio. It is a public health matter. I know it had closed several times, almost on a weekly basis, when I first took over the portfolio. I used to manage a swimming pool when I was a young bloke and a lot fitter, and I was a lifeguard and used to manage all the chemicals. So I know what a hard job it is in cleanliness. I fished out a few from the bottom of the pool, let me say, but we will see what ...

**Mr BALDWIN:** Did you pick oranges too?

**Mr BURKE:** I bet you perved on the girls in bikinis too!

**Dr BURNS:** Five to six times, I am advised. Is that correct, Dr Ritchie?

**Dr RITCHIE:** That is as near as we can get.

**Dr BURNS:** I suppose we can be flippant about it, but it is a fact of life of swimming pools, unfortunately. People have learned to use the pool, and children know the parameters. If it gets closed, well, it really affects all of them and their mates.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** Moving on. This will be last time that I will call the clock. It is now 12.25 pm, and we will be finishing up at 1.05 pm. That concludes consideration of Output 3.2.

### **Output 3.3 – Natural Resource Management**

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** The committee will now consider Output 3.3, Natural Resource Management. Shadow?

**Mr BALDWIN:** Thank you, Mr Chairman. It is very important area, and out of my raft and raft of questions here, I am going to pick two in the interests of time. *Mimosa pigra* is a noxious weed that attracts a subsidy to help landowners combat it. I am informed that there have been some delays in payment of that subsidy. Could you clarify that for me? Are there outstanding payments, how long have they been outstanding - that sort of thing?

**Dr BURNS:** Well, I know that there has been a review of the whole weeds program. As you are quite aware, there has been an amalgamation between Weeds and Bushfires. I hope one of your questions is going to be about bushfires because, 200 000-odd more vehicles, more gear ...

**Mr BALDWIN:** Can you stick to the weeds, minister, for a minute?

**Dr BURNS:** You probably do not want to go near a good news story ...

**Mr BALDWIN:** That is my second question.

**Dr BURNS:** I will defer to ... Well, they love me, the Bushfire brigades. I have given each one of them ...

**Members** interjecting.

**Mr BALDWIN:** I am glad, I am heartened.

**Dr BURNS:** No, you can carp, member for Daly, but I have given \$150 000. Each one has a set of gear ...

**Mr BALDWIN:** I will come back when he has finished.

**Dr BURNS:** ... the whole lot; \$200 000-odd extra for operational and recurrent expenditure; and I have got them an extra two vehicles per year. I have worked hard for the Bushfire Brigades. You can laugh at it, you can put it down, but they are very happy with me as minister. Over to you, Dr Ritchie.

**Dr RITCHIE:** Shadow minister, it is my understanding that there are no payments that have been delayed - in other words, there is nobody who is owed money or had reasonable expectations of getting money under any weeds grants program that has not been met. What has happened is that the amount that has, historically, been allocated to the weed subsidy program has been reallocated to address the pressing need for the government, the Crown, to look after its estate. We were getting to a stage where adjoining landowners were saying: 'It is our priority for you to fix up your own backyard'.

**Mr BALDWIN:** Can I understand from that answer, minister, that the subsidy that used to be available for fighting a weed such as *Mimosa pigra* - and that one, in particular - is now not available to landowners?

**Dr BURNS:** Well, we are always looking for partnerships with landowners and ...

**Mr BALDWIN:** Yes or no would do!

**Dr BURNS:** No, well ... I am told that, in those partnerships that I just mentioned, we will be looking for them in the 2004-05 year.

**Mr BALDWIN:** Is the subsidy still available for *Mimosa pigra*? For land-holders who are affected by that weed, is it still available or is it gone?

**Dr BURNS:** I will introduce Mr Rod Applegate. He can answer this complex question.

**Mr BALDWIN:** Thank you, minister! Complex? Yes or no!

**Mr APPLEGATE:** Rod Applegate. It is complex. Basically, the subsidy scheme as it existed was reviewed in the last year and it was found to be wanting in a number of areas. We currently have a number of options to either replace that subsidy scheme or take it forward in another guise currently under consideration. We expect that the funding that has been allocated in previous years will continue, but it may not necessarily be in the form of a subsidy scheme to individual land-holders. It may take other forms.

**Dr BURNS:** Mr Applegate, did you want to elucidate on the report and, basically, what the problems were that were identified with the previous scheme?

**Mr APPLEGATE:** The previous scheme as it operated was, basically, very iniquitous in that very little money went to the land-holders in the Northern Territory. A large proportion of that fund was going to a few individuals, and where the money was going was not exactly in treating any weed problems in a very strategic sense. It was assessed as being fairly ineffective in the overall scheme of treating major priority weeds and moving down the catchment.

We also worked out that there were some flaws in the administration of the whole scheme, which we found left us fairly vulnerable. That was the basis of the review and what we found in the review. What we now wish to put in place is still being considered.

**Mr BALDWIN:** In the past, when the subsidy was available, have land-holders, say in the Mary River basin, had access to the subsidy? Have they taken it up? Have you paid them that subsidy? Has their spraying of *Mimosa pigra* been effective on their properties in the Mary River?

**Dr BURNS:** You know yourself, member for Daly, it is a fairly patchy result in that area. There are some landowners who have done an excellent job in controlling *Mimosa pigra*, and worked very hard at it ...

**Mr Baldwin:** Absolutely.

**Dr BURNS:** ... and I commend their efforts. However, what Mr Applegate is talking about is the equitable distribution and application of funds across the Northern Territory. As we know, weeds exist all over the Northern Territory. I have had approaches from pastoralists in the Barkly region who are very concerned about the possible spread of weeds out there.

There are a lot of weeds out there. We have to watch them very closely and make sure that our resources are applied equitably.

**Mr BALDWIN:** In the case of *mimosa pigra*, minister, how long has that subsidy been available to land-holders?

**Dr BURNS:** I do not know the exact history, member for Daly. However, my recollection is that it has been in place for some time. As you travel about the Territory, over the Mary River, and over towards Labelle Station and other places, unfortunately, there are *mimosa* infestations everywhere. What Mr Applegate is talking about is the equitable application of funds in the most strategic manner.

**Mr BALDWIN:** Is it 10 years, minister, or five or 15?

**Dr BURNS:** I will take advice on that. Mr Applegate.

**Mr APPLEGATE:** The weeds subsidy scheme, as I recall, commenced in about 1993. It has been ramped up from a smaller amount than what currently exists to the largest amount in about 1998-99, and then sitting around \$295 000 for the last four years. That is the quantum over the 10 or 11 years it has been applied to, both in herbicide subsidy scheme and in direct weed subsidy.

**Mr BALDWIN:** Okay, so it is not now available, but one would expect that land-holders are still putting in application, if there was one?

**Dr BURNS:** Mr Applegate made it clear that there is consideration of a couple of options. Obviously, given the concerns about the previous scheme and its equitable application, if that were to go forward again those issues need to be addressed; or there could be a different scheme and different incentives offered. We are a flexible government. We are always looking for new ways to do things. It

might not always be in the way that you have done them, member for Daly.

**Mr BALDWIN:** Thank you. So, it is not currently available?

**Dr BURNS:** I did not say that.

**Mr BURKE:** What are you saying?

**Mr BALDWIN:** Well, you are saying there is no money there, so it is not available.

**Dr BURNS:** I did not say that.

**Mr BALDWIN:** Well, is the money there for it?

**Dr BURNS:** Mr Applegate has indicated that there is a level of funding, but the detail and the options are being examined about how it is going to be applied. So, stop trying to assume or assert things that are not so, member for Daly.

**Mr BALDWIN:** Is there a level of funding or a subsidy that land-holders can apply for, to treat *mimosa pigra* - now, right now?

**Dr BURNS:** As of this minute?

**Mr BALDWIN:** Right now.

**Dr BURNS:** No ...

**Mr Baldwin:** Thank you.

**Dr BURNS:** ... but we are looking at the revitalisation of this particular scheme.

**Mr BALDWIN:** My second question in this area to you, minister, out of my raft of questions is: can you tell me how many staff are employed currently - as of today if possible - in the Bushfires Council area?

**Dr BURNS:** Yes, member for Daly, good question. I have been aware that there have been some vacancies, but I will defer to Mr Applegate. I will say again that ...

**Mr Baldwin:** They love you, okay.

**Dr BURNS:** Yes, but I am working through the issues. That is not to say there are not issues there. However, these are people who give of their time. They work in dangerous, dirty and hot conditions. I know. I went out and lit a fire a burning control fire. I know what they do and I commend them, as you do.

**Mr Baldwin:** Did you get on TV?

**Mr Burke:** This is the first time I have only wanted to go four-and-a-half hours.

**Members** interjecting.

**Dr BURNS:** Make sure you take your wife home a bunch of flowers, member for Brennan.

**Mr Burke:** I tell you, it would be better company than sitting here with you.

**Mr BALDWIN:** Can I have the answer, minister, please?

**Dr BURNS:** Twenty-two. That would be jointly in the Bushfires and Weeds. Am I right? No, just in bushfires.

**Mr BALDWIN:** Are all the position within the structure filled?

**Dr BURNS:** I will defer to either Mr Applegate or Dr Ritchie on that one.

**Mr APPLEGATE:** I am pretty confident that all fire control officer positions in all regions are now filled, including a temporary arrangement in the new fire control region in Arnhem Land, where we have recently moved an existing officer out of Vernon to fill that space, pending permanent recruitment to the position.

**Mr BALDWIN:** So, all others are filled. Thank you. I will leave all my other questions there.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** Are there any questions from the committee?

**Mr WOOD:** I have, but we will not make it if we do, so we will go on. There are more important areas. No, not more important - as important

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** That concludes consideration of output 3.3.

#### **Output 3.4 – Wildlife Management**

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** Are there any questions?

**Mr BALDWIN:** Unfortunately, I will have to leave my questions in this area in the interests of time.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** Do committee members have any questions for 3.4?

**Mr WOOD:** I do, but keep going.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** That is a no?

**Mr WOOD:** No. Keep going.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** I am not stopping you from asking questions. That concludes consideration of Output 3.4.

#### **Output 3.5 – Natural Systems**

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** The committee will now consider Output 3.5, Natural Systems. Shadow, do you have any questions.

**Mr BALDWIN:** No, I could ask about the herbarium and how it is going, but I will not, in interest of time, and other issues.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** It is your call. Member for Nelson.

**Mr WOOD:** Yes, it is too important to let it go. With all the discussion about water in the Northern Territory, under Performance Measures, Quantity, it says water resource monitoring station

maintained, this year, 112, next year 850. Minister, do you believe that we could maintain our monitoring stations considering the work we are doing on the Daly and other rivers to see how large our water resource is?

**Dr BURNS:** Yes.

**Mr WOOD:** Why are we reduced in the number of water monitoring stations by about 160, unless I am misreading the budget?

**Dr BURNS:** Dr Ritchie, do you wish to defer?

**Dr RITCHIE:** No, no. The reason that figure is lower is because there was a strategic assessment of what we needed to do our job. Over the years, there were a number of monitoring stations on bores that were strategically not considered to be correct, so we focussed our efforts on those that are.

**Mr WOOD:** Are they just on bores, or on creeks and rivers?

**Dr RITCHIE:** These are actually monitoring groundwater. The ones on the rivers are all being maintained.

**Mr WOOD:** That is good. Thank you.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** There being no more questions on that output, that concludes consideration of Output Group 3.

#### **OUTPUT GROUP 4 – Transport Output 4.1 - Transport Policy and Planning**

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** The committee will now consider Output Group 4, Transport. I call for questions on Output 4.1, Transport Policy and Planning. Shadow?

**Mr BURKE:** I had a number of questions in this area, but I will ask one: The CPV Board, what are the costs for 2003-04 and what was its output?

**Dr BURNS:** I am not sure whether the CPV Board falls under this output area. You have asked what it has achieved and what its costs are?

**Mr BURKE:** Yes.

**Dr BURNS:** I am more than willing to talk about it. Its cost is \$192 000. It has a myriad of achievements, member for Brennan. There have been delegations of power under the act transferred to the chair commencing industry self-regulation. The board has met 11 times. The 2003 tariff review has been completed for taxis; similarly, with 2004. Basically, there is a whole range of issues that come up in this area. I could go on for some quite some considerable time about the achievements of the board. The board is a great initiative. It still has further ...

**Mr BURKE:** You could table it.

**Dr BURNS:** I beg your pardon?

**Mr BURKE:** Just table it all.

**Dr BURNS:** It is actually ...

**Members** interjecting.



**Dr BURNS:** No, it has not got that. It is just that if I give you that I will not have another bit to have a look at. There is this one here I will table.

**Mr BURKE:** That is 30 pages. Are you going to table all that? I will take what I can get.

**Dr BURNS:** There you go, member for Brennan.

**Mr BURKE:** Essentially, the thrust is moving to decentralisation from the department to self-regulation.

**Dr BURNS:** Yes, industry self-regulation. However, it is a step-wise progress. They are considering some quite major issues, including the cap on taxi numbers. I have also asked them to have a look at the viability of the industry. I have asked them to have a look at the fees that are paid by industry, and have a very close look at the costs and income associated with operators. I believe the operators are coming together. They have given information - which, previously, they would not have given - confidentially to the board, which enables the board to do an economic analysis. I take the taxi industry and limousine, private hire car industry very seriously, along with the mini-cabs. It is a very difficult area, with often competing priorities and interests. However, I am doing my best in that regard.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** Committee, any questions on Output 4.1, Transport Policy and Planning. That concludes consideration of Output 4.1.

#### **Output 4.2 – Marine and Rail Safety Regulation**

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** The committee will now move to consider Output 4.2. Are there any questions? Shadow? Committee, any questions? That concludes consideration of Output 4.2.

#### **Output 4.3 – Passenger Transport Services**

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** The committee will now move to consider Output 4.3, Passenger Transport Services. Shadow, any questions?

**Mr BURKE:** Could I ask quickly why the review of the bus services, particularly in the area of Palmerston, is taking so long? It has been 18 months at least.

**Dr BURNS:** It has taken a long time, member for Brennan, but these are quite complex issues to do with bus timetables.

**Mr BURKE:** Another quite complex issue.

**Dr BURNS:** You may have had a simplistic approach to things ...

**Mr Burke:** We could make the decision a lot faster than that.

**Dr BURNS:** ... flat earth policy. However, interconnection of routes, usage, it is all ...

**Mr Baldwin:** Oh yes, all the things that have been happening for a lot of years.

**Dr BURNS:** Well, it is always time to have a fresh look at things. I will refer to - do you want to take it? Please introduce yourself.

**Mr SINCLAIR:** Tony Sinclair. There are really three components to it. There has been quite a lot of work done already in scoping, finding out where people's travel needs are, their origin and destination, and why they use public transport. The idea is to set an overall strategic framework, not

just about bus services, but for all public transport needs for the whole of the Northern Territory. Under that, we needed to establish some minimum service levels for public transport services: who gets what, why, when, how. Obviously, there are minimum numbers that it is viable to extend, for example, in bus services. We have a working group, which is an inter-departmental working group, which is going through looking at all of these issues and what the criteria are that we should put in place.

The third part of it is how should we deliver them: the contractual framework; should we be continuing as we do, using a mixture of government provider; how long should the contracts be for; should the contracts allow fare retention of the operators; and all those types of things.

**Dr BURNS:** Did you want to put a time frame on the completion of the report?

**Mr SINCLAIR:** I would hope we would have the whole report finished by the end of this year. Certainly, the first part of it should be going to government in August.

**Mr BURKE:** Without labouring the question, surely, in the suburb of Farrar in Palmerston, they do not have a bus service. It is a suburb in the city of Palmerston. They do not have a bus service at all. Those mums have to get their kids to Bakewell School in the mornings - there is no bus. Surely, within this strategic review, you can look at, what I would call a hot spot, or some hot spots, and say: 'Well it is only an adjustment to existing routes or an additional bus'. It cannot be that difficult. We have been waiting 18 months at least.

**Dr BURNS:** Mr Sinclair.

**Mr SINCLAIR:** Certainly, we constantly get requests for extensions of bus service, and we look at those on the basis of the actual demand as it currently is. Sometimes, we find the demand is quite a lot less, and the real demand - that is the people who are prepared to travel on a bus - is quite a lot less than the theoretical demand - people who think that they would like to have a bus there in case they wanted to travel on it. Obviously funds are limited, and so we have to look at what the real demand is going to be. However, out of this review, we would have some basic parameters that say: 'If you fall into this particular category, you are entitled to a bus'.

**Mr BURKE:** I would have thought that it would be a basic responsibility of government, whether one person got on the bus or 100 people; that is, that the people in a suburb and a city should have a bus service that runs through it. That is just a cost to the government. Anyway, I will leave that alone. I have no more on that.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** Are there any other questions from the committee on Output 4.3 - Passenger Transport Services?

**Mr WOOD:** Yes, I would like to follow up that question. Anyway, I will ask just one question that relates to performance measures. You have under costs: 'average costs per passenger carried on school transport services'. In last year's budget it was \$3.62 and it is now estimated at \$7.03 - nearly double. Can you tell us why the average cost of a passenger on school transport is as high as it is?

**Dr BURNS:** That is a good point, member for Nelson. We have let out our new bus contracts. Basically, there have been increases. We are providing a better service with security cameras and close monitoring systems; there are new low rider buses that are used. Basically, the new contract was a competitive contract. It actually cost more since the last contractor to actually run the buses. It was quite a torturous process. It took longer, particularly in the instance of Darwin, than some of the operators would have liked. They have to amortise their new buses over a certain period, and that is part of the explanation for the increase. I am not sure whether Tony wants to add to that?

**Mr SINCLAIR:** No, you have summed that up pretty well, minister. Yes, what we are talking about is a much better service, as well. We are talking about 80% of school buses being airconditioned within a

year or two, and those kinds of things.

**Dr BURNS:** It was an extra \$1.73m for the renegotiation of the bus contracts. That was a torturous process.

**Mr WOOD:** Thank you, minister.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** No more questions, member for Nelson?

**Mr WOOD:** No.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** All right. That concludes consideration of Output 4.3 - Transport Services.

#### **Output 4.4 – Transport Facilities**

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** The committee will now consider Output 4.4 - Transport Facilities. Shadow?

**Mr BURKE:** No.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** No questions. Any members?. That concludes consideration of Output Group 4.0.

#### **OUTPUT GROUP 5.0 – Infrastructure Development**

##### **Output 5.1 – Infrastructure Development**

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** The committee will now consider Output Group 5.0 - Infrastructure Development, Output 5.1 - Infrastructure Development.

**Mr BURKE:** Minister, I understand your department has carriage of the infrastructure and the associated works of Palmerston Recreation Centre. How much will be made available for the Palmerston Recreation Community Centre in the 2004-05 budget other than the \$1.8m allocated for the headworks?

**Dr BURNS:** Actually, you are right. There is \$1.8m being allocated to the headworks. I believe the Minister for Community Development, Sport and associated portfolios has written to the Mayor of Palmerston, basically setting out progress on this particular matter. I believe it is very much a work in progress and there is negotiation about the scope and size of this development. We are committed to it. If necessary, given the time frames involved, there is always access to Treasurer's Advance. Basically, this is a project that will be completed. The headworks have been allocated against it and, basically, that is the story.

**Mr BURKE:** What is the government's planned total cash contribution to the project, excluding headworks?

**Dr BURNS:** That is a difficult question, member for Brennan, because the final scope and design of the works has not been settled. As you are well aware, there has been a notional figure of \$8m - or various figures - banded around. However, until there is actually settling and clarity in the scope and design, it is a very difficult question to answer.

**Mr BURKE:** From your departmental view, do you believe the centre will open in 2005?

**Dr BURNS:** The Chief Minister, I can see here, has also written to the Mayor of Palmerston. I am pretty sure the Minister for Community Development has also. The Chief Minister has given an undertaking that it should be completed by the end of 2005.

**Mr BURKE:** The Palmerston High School has been in the budget for three years now and it is in the

capital works program for 2004-05. Will it be completed for the opening of the school year 2006?

**Dr BURNS:** As you are aware - and I am sure you asked the Treasurer and Minister for Education about this - there is a secondary school review afoot. Basically, the shape and size of infrastructure like that is very dependent on the outcome of the secondary review. We are a government that likes to consult with the community and that is what we are doing now about the secondary review. There are things on the table there about a primary school, a middle school and a high school and, I suppose, depending on the public consultations and the decisions of government, basically that would set the shape of the Palmerston High School. It is a commitment of government. It will be built but, at this stage, I cannot give the shape of it.

**Mr BURKE:** Certainly there is no legitimacy in your statements in the budget, therefore, that it will be built in this budget year?

**Dr BURNS:** Member for Brennan, I am sure you exhaustively questioned the minister for Education on this issue, and I am sure he gave you very clear answers. In many ways, as you know, there is a process for capital works. We would rely on the Department of Education to give us the scope and design of the work, and that is contingent on the secondary review.

**Mr BURKE:** If you are talking about the scope and design of the work, given your expertise in your department, tell me how you build a modern high school for \$10m.

**Dr BURNS:** You are just talking about hypotheticals here, member for Brennan. I have already given you the answer.

**Mr BURKE:** No, I am not talking about the cash that is in the capital works program. Please, come on! You have \$10m in the capital works program to build a high school in Palmerston. Tell me how close we will get to a high school?

**Dr BURNS:** I have already told you in terms of the recreation centre at Palmerston and other works that flexibility is the key. It depends on the scope of the work and the detailed design. I am not going to commit anything here.

**Mr BURKE:** So, \$10m would bear no relation to the eventual cost of that facility, in your opinion?

**Dr BURNS:** I am not saying that.

**Mr BURKE:** Do you think it will be close?

**Dr BURNS:** Really, it depends on the design and scope that is put forward by the Department of Education. You know how it works. The Department of Education says they want to build some laboratories or special - there are many parts of the education system that are quite specialised. We do not say that they need so many laboratory benches and a special storage area here, and a volatile cabinet there or an aerating cabinet there. We wait for the Department of Education to tell us about the fit-out and design. These are all hypothetical questions, member for Brennan.

**Mr BALDWIN:** Then why use \$10m? Why not put \$20m?

**Mr BURKE:** Yes, why do you not put \$30m?

**Dr BURNS:** Well, you can talk about hypotheticals. If you want to talk about capital works, let us talk about your last budget.

**Mr BALDWIN:** It is your cash and your budget.

**Mr BURKE:** I will tell you about the capital ...

**Dr BURNS:** I know you do not want to talk about it because the revote was actually higher than the cash. So, do not come pointing the finger here about how much we have here. Our revote has been going down over the years since we have been in power, and the cash has been going up. We have a cashed-up capital works program, so do not go pointing the finger at us. Have a look at your own navel before you go pointing the finger at us.

**Mr BURKE:** Can you tell me what the \$10m, therefore, stands for? If it does not stand for a school that is not scoped up, what does the \$10m stand for?

**Dr BURNS:** As you well know, it is a figure that is put in the forward estimates for a secondary school at Palmerston. I have already given you answers about the design, the detail. You could make ...

**Mr BURKE:** It is not in forward estimates, it is in cash, minister, and you have allocated \$10m in this capital works program to build it this year. You are telling me you do not even know what it is going to look like, you do not even know what the scope is? I will say it ...

**Dr BURNS:** I am advised by Mr Galton it is a conceptual design that you can always add and extend, so it is cash - which is more than you had.

**Mr BURKE:** It is a conceptual design? You know that the CEO of ...

**Dr BURNS:** It is program. No, it is program, I have been informed.

**Mr BURKE:** You know the CEO of the Department of Education is on the public record as saying he believes it will cost about \$22.5m?

**Dr BURNS:** I have not seen those comments

**Mr BURKE:** I would have thought in your department it would have been of interest because you only have \$10m allocated.

**Dr BURNS:** When did he make those comments? Was this prior to the secondary review?

**Mr BURKE:** It was at a public meeting in Palmerston at which I was in attendance.

**Dr BURNS:** When was that, member for Brennan?

**Mr BURKE:** It was about three weeks ago.

**Dr BURNS:** I am not aware of those comments.

**Mr BURKE:** I tell you Palmerston people are starting to wonder what this thing is going to be ...

**Dr Burns:** As I am advised, these things come back to Cabinet ...

**Mr BURKE:** ... and when it will be opened. They have been waiting for years.

**Dr BURNS:** We are a flexible government. We will act on the secondary review.

**Mr BURKE:** In Katherine, what is happening - and if you can do this as a bit of synopsis, please, not a PR statement - with regards to the floodwater inundation in Katherine and your promises to the

residents?

**Dr BURNS:** Yes, that is an important issue, member for Brennan. I had an update on this last week. Departmental officers are waiting for the creek to dry out so that they can machinery in there and widen and also excavate the creek, and get rid of any debris, weed growth or even small suckers of trees. It has been a very wet and prolonged Wet Season, as you are aware, but I have given a commitment to those residents.

There is also a very comprehensive hydrological survey that is being done. I was asked in Katherine, by Mr Marcus Bader, of all people, about why there is a need for another hydrological survey. The answer is that the other surveys looked a bit here and a bit there; this is a comprehensive hydrological survey that is going to look from Tindal right back to where it flows back into the Katherine River. We need this scientific data to find out exactly how to address the problem. However, we are addressing the problem of the waterway.

**Mr BURKE:** In that statement, you are reassuring Katherine people that, before the next Wet Season, you will have done the rehab and upgrading work on the drains and, if there are any additional obstruction, you will ...

**Dr BURNS:** Some of those drains belong to council, some of the waterways along Bicentenary Road are the responsibility of government. I have given that undertaking.

**Mr BURKE:** Okay. No more, thank you.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** Does the committee have any questions on 5.1? That being the case, that concludes consideration of Output Group 5.

**OUTPUT GROUP 6 – Territory Roads  
Output 6.1 – Road Network Management**

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** The committee will now consider Output Group 6, Territory Roads, Output 6.1, Road Network Management. Shadow, do you have any questions?

**Mr BURKE:** You might want to table these. I believe they are all questions I gave you on notice. I can read them and you can table them.

**Dr BURNS:** I am not into tabling. You ask them. Organise your time better. Are we going to talk about traffic lights in this section?

**Mr BURKE:** I want to talk about the Darwin Port Corporation ...

**Dr Burns:** But that is not in this output area.

**Mr BURKE:** ... but your process prevents us from getting anywhere near it. I understand that, for the last three years, we have not been able to get near it.

**Dr BURNS:** I was hoping we could talk about traffic lights and how one of the members of CLP wants me to put in an extra traffic light on the corner of Duke Street in Stuart Park. The member for Port Darwin! Do I have leave to table this?

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** If you wish to.

**Mr BURKE:** Minister!

**Dr BURNS:** It says:

*Minister, could you take steps to expedite the installation of the traffic lights so to reduce the risk of car accidents at this difficult intersection.*

It is not the CLP; I reckon it is the TLP - the traffic light party. For 27 years there was a proliferation of traffic lights, and now they want another one on the corner of Duke Street and the Stuart Highway. Absolutely ridiculous!

**Mr BALDWIN:** Minister, is there a safety issue there?

**Dr BURNS:** There may be a safety issue there. I am examining the data, but I am certainly not putting a set of traffic lights in there, as the member for Port Darwin wants. The traffic light party!

**Mr BALDWIN:** Minister, could we talk about our questions?

**Mr BURKE:** Minister, the first thing your government did was rip out a beautiful roundabout at Palmerston at the shopping centre and put in traffic lights. Tell me, on your priorities, what is the first set of traffic lights you are going to remove?

**Dr BURNS:** I am taking advice on that, member for Brennan.

**Mr Baldwin:** You haven't got a thought of your own; that is why.

**Dr BURNS:** Yes, I have.

**Mr Baldwin:** No, you have not.

**Dr BURNS:** Yes, I have.

**Mr BURKE:** Can I ask to list by item how much by program and cash was expended in 2003-04 on national highways, urban arterials, local roads, and rural arterials?

**Dr BURNS:** Do we have that to table, Mr Galton? We will give the member for Brennan the whole lot, hey?

**Mr BURKE:** Good, thank you. How much was ...

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** Hang on, please, member for Brennan.

**Dr BURNS:** That is the one there. I seek leave to table.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** Certainly. Next question, please.

**Mr BURKE:** How much of that was federal money, and how much was Territory money? Is that there?

**Dr BURNS:** I can tell you. Here we go.

**Mr BURKE:** I know you spend money on roads. What I want to know is how much is federal money allocated and how much is your own?

**Dr BURNS:** In terms of national highways, are you talking about here?

**Mr BURKE:** All of them. They allocate money for black spots, like at Palmerston at Lambrick Avenue.

**Dr BURNS:** Yes. In terms of national highways, the cash expended as of 22 June 2004 - look I will table this, so as you can follow the figures with me ...

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** It is already tabled, minister.

**Dr BURNS:** ... member for Brennan. I am trying to assist you in this. In terms of the major projects: national highways - \$8.047m; urban arterials - \$1.115m ; local roads ...

A witness interjecting.

**Dr BURNS:** Sorry, national highways, major projects - \$8.047m; minor new works - \$1.207m; and repairs and maintenance 2003-04 - I have been talking about those figures - \$14.304m. I will add that one of the worrying parts of the release of the White Paper was that there were asterisks in the out years against what should be the maintenance budget for our national roads. That is a problem.

**Mr BURKE:** With a footnote advising you to expect at least as much as you got the previous year, and possibly more.

**Dr BURNS:** The footnote did not say that.

**Mr BURKE:** Yes, it did. Read it.

**Dr BURNS:** No, it did not. The footnote did not say that. It said it was a matter for negotiation.

**Mr BURKE:** It did so. But you could expect to receive at least ...

**Dr BURNS:** The footnote says 'NB'. This is your mate who puts all the money into his local electorate of Gwydir. He says: 'Maintenance funding for 2005-06 to 2008-09 is yet to be allocated'. So, that is \$80m a year of uncertainty from the Commonwealth. I do not know what game they are playing at but, obviously, you are backing them up on it.

**Mr BURKE:** Well, I know what I got from the federal minister's office. It says: '... but you can expect to receive at least as much as you received in the previous year'.

**Ms LAWRIE:** Table that.

**Mr BURKE:** I will table it. I will go and get it for you.

**Ms LAWRIE:** It is a good commitment.

**Mr BURKE:** Last year, the government allocated \$3m for work on the Mereenie Loop Road. Was it expended; if not, why not? Where has the money gone if it was not expended?

**Dr BURNS:** There was an allocation of \$3m made late last year for roads in Central Australia. My understanding is that that is a quite separate allocation for the Mereenie Loop. However, I will let Mr Galton report.

**Mr BURKE:** It was a separate allocation, was it? It was not Mereenie Loop?

**Mr GALTON:** No. There was the \$3m program for Mereenie Loop last year.



**Mr BURKE:** And it was spent on Mereenie Loop?

**Mr GALTON:** No, very little of that money has been spent this year.

**Mr BURKE:** So what happened to it?

**Mr GALTON:** We have not been able to get access to do the works on the roads.

**Mr BURKE:** So, it is a revote?

**Mr GALTON:** It will be part of the \$10m revote for ...

**Dr BURNS:** There has been significant work taken on at the beginning of the Mereenie Loop.

**Mr BURKE:** You were saying what a great government you were last year on what you were going to do on the Mereenie Loop, and you tell me there is \$3m you did not spend. That has been bundled up into next year?

**Dr BURNS:** I was quite correct, member for Brennan. The \$3m that I was speaking about formerly was in relation to maintenance on Central Australian roads. Do you want it detailed where that \$3m was spent.

**Mr BURKE:** No. This was a separate allocation, minister, which your officer said was for the Mereenie.

**Dr BURNS:** No, no. Well, we are just clarifying these issues to do with allocation of funds in Central Australia. Could you just tell us about that \$3m for repairs and maintenance.

**Mr BURKE:** For Mereenie Loop please.

**Dr BURNS:** No, no. I am directing you, Mr Galton.

**Mr BURKE:** You directing him to give the answer under the other question I asked.

**Dr BURNS:** I have another one of the press releases where you said you were the minister. You are wrong about everything. You call yourself the minister for Infrastructure and Transport in your press release. Well, you are not the minister for Infrastructure and Transport, member for Brennan. I am, and I am asking Mr Galton to talk about that \$3m in repairs and maintenance.

**Mr GALTON:** Thank you, minister. There was \$3m allocated late in the year for repairs and maintenance in Centralian roads, including the Plenty Highway, the Sandover Highway, and the Barkly Stock Route. That allocation of \$3m was quite late in the year and it has already been spent.

**Mr BURKE:** Thank you.

**Mr GALTON:** I can talk about some minor works. Approximately \$0.5m worth of works has been done on the Mereenie Loop Road. The crossing at Finke River has been upgraded. That work is complete and has cost \$478 000.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** Shadow, panel, minister and officers, that concludes consideration of this output group. On behalf of the committee, I would like to thank officers from the Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Environment for attending today. Thank you.

**Mr BURKE:** Thank you, minister and officers.

**Dr BURNS:** Mr Chairman, once again I commend officers from DIPE. You have done a fantastic job. It is a complex portfolio. Finally, once again, I wish Mr Chambers all the best for his retirement, and I hope he enjoyed this estimates.

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The committee suspended.

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### **MINISTER VATSKALIS' PORTFOLIOS**

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** I welcome the Minister for Mines and Energy, Primary Industry and Fisheries, and Ethnic Affairs. I invite him to introduce the officials accompanying him and, if he wishes, to make an opening statement on behalf of his portfolio responsibilities.

**Mr VATSKALIS:** Thank you, Mr Chairman. Yes, I would like to make a short statement. This afternoon I will deal with the committee's questions in relation to my portfolio Output Groups 2 and 3 of the Budget of the Department of Business, Industries and Resource Development which is Minerals and Petroleum Industry Services, and Animal, Plant and Fisheries Industry Services; and Output Group 5.3, Multicultural Advancement, under Community Engagement in the Department of the Chief Minister. My colleague, Minister Henderson, has already answered the whole of agency questions and specific questions in relation to Output Group 1 of DBIRD.

Let me introduce my colleagues, Mike Burgess, CEO; John Carroll, General Manager Minerals and Energy; Phil Vivian, Chief Financial Officer; Roger Smith, General Manager, Primary Industry; and Richard Sellers, General Manager, Fisheries.

I will answer any of the committee's questions which relate to government policy, but may call upon relevant officials to respond to any matters of operational detail.

Output Group 2 - Minerals and Petroleum Industry Services: members would be aware that the minerals and petroleum sector remains the largest contributor to the Territory's gross state product. Through building the Territory's resources base, the government has allocated \$15.2m over four years to programs designed to assist the industry. We are acquiring geotechnical data and making it available online through the latest technology web-enabling data bases and mapping systems to encourage exploration throughout the Territory. The recent release of the STRIKE geological mapping system is a wonderful example of our pre-eminent position in the area of industry assistance which is setting the standard Australia-wide.

We are boosting staffing levels to improve the rate of grant of mining tenements. At the same time, we are working closely with stakeholders to better understand each other's aspirations and priorities to improve access to land. We have provided additional resources to our indigenous and mining industry services to promote the employment, training and other benefits of exploration and mining to indigenous Territorians.

Output Group 3 - Animal, Plant and Fisheries Industry Services: our Primary Industry and Fisheries sector continue to be major contributing factors to the economy and quality of life in the Territory. The value of rural industries and fisheries production was estimated at \$428m in 2003-04, an increase of 5.7% over 2002-03, and employing some 3000 people, according to the ABS Census 2001. The value of production is forecast to increase by around 16% to \$495m in 2004-05. The Northern Territory government has committed over \$21m directly to the primary industry programs, not including fisheries, during the 2004-05 financial year. The Northern Territory government has committed an additional \$457 000 to help expand indigenous pastoral and horticultural enterprise on Aboriginal land, and the development of employment opportunities for indigenous people in rural and remote

areas.

Fisheries: the Northern Territory government has committed over \$5m directly to fisheries programs during the 2004-05 financial year. A review of the *Fisheries Act* has commenced, with extensive consultation and the preparation of recommendations for Cabinet consideration to occur in 2004-05. The Fisheries Group will continue to work in a co-management partnership with all stakeholders in ensuring the sustainability of the Northern Territory's aquatic resources.

Key activities for 2004-05 include: complete the review of the coastal net fishery; implement the new Spanish Mackerel Management Plan; review the Mud Crab and Barramundi Management Plans, and complete a strategic development plan for the demersal fishery. The barramundi fishery will receive specific attention, with the commencement of a five year strategic plan and 10 year output for the fishery. It will be developed in consultation with all stakeholders to provide greater certainty for all stakeholders.

Recreational fishing education and community involvement will be further developed with expansion of the river (inaudible) centres in regional areas. The Fisheries Group research program will continue to back up the management and sustainable growth of the fishing sector, including the continuation of the groundbreaking (inaudible) project and the commencement of the Black Jewfish study. The Marine Ranger Program continues to expand, with two new ranger units scheduled to come on-line in 2004-05. The Indigenous Consultative Framework will also expand, with further development of the Maningrida Consultative Committee. The Fisheries Group will continue to provide statutory services, such as licensing and (inaudible) services such as the Aquatic Pest Program to maintain the sustainable growth of the fisheries sector.

Multicultural Advancement, Output 5.3 under Community Engagement, Department of the Chief Minister: the Office of Ethnic Affairs is responsible for coordinating services and activities across government for ethnic communities, and for developing and delivering initiatives that promote multicultural participation in the community, and enable ethnic groups to contribute to government decision-making. The 2004-05 budget is \$2.3m, compared with a revised 2003-04 budget of \$1.7m. The revised 2003-04 budget increased due to the recognition of revenue-related expenses associated with interpreter services, and notional charging for services provided by DCIS. The increased budget in 2004-05 is a direct result of the establishment of \$1.5m three year Ethnic Communities Facility Development Program, and increased funding of \$15 000 for the Ethnic Affairs Sponsorship Program. Thank you, Mr Chairman.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** Thank you, minister. The committee will now proceed to consider the estimates of proposed expenditure contained in Appropriation Bill 2004-05 as they relate to ministerial portfolio responsibilities of the Minister for Mines and Energy from the agency of Business, Industry and Resource Development. I should make a note to committee members that whilst we see the output groups listed as 2, 3 and 5, do not think that I have missed out on any. I will now call for questions on Output Group 2.

I have missed a bit of housekeeping. The time is now 1.45 pm, and for the *Hansard* record, pursuant to section 12 of the Terms of Reference of the Estimates Committee, I wish to advise that Madam Speaker has nominated the member for Nightcliff to replace the member for Karama.

**OUTPUT GROUP 2 – Minerals and Petroleum Industry Services**  
**Output 2.1 – Minerals and Petroleum Resource Development Services**

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** I will now call for questions on Output Group 2, Minerals and Petroleum Industry Services, Output 2.1, Minerals and Petroleum Resource Development Services. Shadow minister.

**Mr DUNHAM:** Minister, can you tell me how exploration licences work?

**Mr VATSKALIS:** Mr Carroll, would you like to explain that?

**Mr CARROLL:** Yes, minister. If somebody wishes to undertake exploration, Mr Dunham, they lodge

an application with the department and there is a whole series of processes under the *Mining Act* through which they go, including the notification of the application in the media.

**Mr DUNHAM:** That is ELAs?

**Mr CARROLL:** ELAs, yes.

**Mr DUNHAM:** Can you tell me how exploration licences actually work? Having been granted one ...

**Mr CARROLL:** If you have one you can go off and mine.

**Mr DUNHAM:** If you have one, what happens?

**Mr CARROLL:** You have an area of land that you are entitled to explore on. You can explore on ...

**Mr DUNHAM:** It is generally on pastoral leases, would that be right?

**Mr CARROLL:** Well no, on any land in the Northern Territory. There are different processes for pastoral leases and for land under the *Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act* but, in both cases, once you have an exploration licence you can go off and explore.

**Mr DUNHAM:** And that is it? No relationship with the department?

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** Can we just address the question through the minister just to be correct.

**Mr DUNHAM:** What specifically I want to know is covenants in terms of expenditure.

**Mr CARROLL:** Yes.

**Mr DUNHAM:** Having been granted an application to explore, you then have a licence to explore ...

**Mr CARROLL:** Yes.

**Mr DUNHAM:** As I understand you are constrained or obliged to spend certain amounts of money. Is that right?

**Mr CARROLL:** In making your application, you make commitments to expend a certain amount on the licence area over a period of time, and you report to us on an annual basis on the progress you are making spending that money.

**Mr DUNHAM:** At any time, you would be able to tell us how much money is being spent on exploration in the Territory?

**Mr CARROLL:** With one caveat, which is there is always a time lag in when the reports come in. However, we do publish figures on that, yes.

**Mr DUNHAM:** Is that going up or down?

**Mr CARROLL:** It is slowly going up, but it has gone down in recent years.

**Mr DUNHAM:** Right, okay. In the explanation of the budget book called the Northern Territory Economy, the figures here are for an increase of 1.2% to \$49m in 2002-03. Can you tell me why Treasury would be using such aged figures when you would think that they would be using 2003-04,

minister?

**Mr VATSKALIS:** Mr Carroll will have this information.

**Mr CARROLL:** Given that we have not got to the end of the 2003-04 year, and we rely on reports from the companies that are doing the exploration, there is always that significant lag in reporting the data.

**Mr DUNHAM:** Okay. So, do you have an estimate?

**Mr CARROLL:** I do not have in my head, but we can give you one if that is appropriate.

**Mr DUNHAM:** I will tell you where I am getting to. There has been a lot of noise about an increased number of applications approved. I am trying to track the impact that has on our economy. I would hope that those approved applications would be splashing money out into the economy for expenditure from employers. The numbers I can get from the budget are a bit disconcerting, particularly when you look at one of your performance measures for this year. For instance, if you look at mineral and petroleum titles and exploration licences administered, the estimate for 2003-04 - the year in hindsight - is \$4642. However, in last year's budget papers, it was estimated to be \$5074. There has been a drop of - whatever that is - 10% in that area. I am just wondering why there are less tenements, both exploration and mining titles, being administered?

**Mr VATSKALIS:** Member for Drysdale, we are finished with Output 2.1. Are you referring to Output 2.2?

**Mr DUNHAM:** No, we are on Output Group 2.0.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** No, Output Group 2.0 is the heading. We are on Output 2.1.

**Mr VATSKALIS:** And you are jumping to Output 2.2 ...

**Mr DUNHAM:** So, we are not going in sequence as we normally do?

**Mr VATSKALIS:** You are jumping to Minerals and Petroleum Resource Management Services.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** Hang on. I will address that. Output Group 2.0, Minerals and Petroleum Industry Services; that is the output group. We are addressing Output 2.1, Minerals and Petroleum Resource Development Services.

**Mr DUNHAM:** I thought we were going to general questions first.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** No.

**Mr DUNHAM:** We are not going to general questions first? That is interesting. Okay. I will go to your geoscientific products that you have released. As I understand from these documents, we are yet to have any success as a result of that; is that right? In terms of proving up minerals.

**Mr VATSKALIS:** That is not my understanding. For example, I was advised by miners and, in particular, Giants Reef in Tennant Creek, that a lot of the results they are gaining is because they have received information from our department.

Recently, Tanami Gold advised me they are going to increase exploration in the Tanami area, based again on information and data we provide through the department. In addition to that, I had feedback from not only miners but also people interested in mining exploration that we are the only jurisdiction

that provides the high quality data for free. A number of people, including the American Commercial Council and the Chinese Ambassador recently, were surprised by what we provide for mineral exploration and they asked for this information to be provided to them.

**Mr DUNHAM:** I am aware of the program. There have been some significant discoveries made, is that what you are saying?

**Mr VATSKALIS:** Not only new discoveries, but they based upon our geoscientific data to target specifically new exploration. Some of our data are not significant like let us say they do exploration; they might do aerial exploration and they get the generic information and based on the generic information they proceeded to do exploration on the ground. But I am pretty sure Mr Carroll can provide more information.

**Mr DUNHAM:** Oh no. The next question ...

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** Shadow, it is up to the minister to determine to answer a question if he wants.

**Mr CARROLL:** A little bit if I may, minister. The whole purpose of the pre-exploration effort is to provide information for potential explorers to get out and explore. The work we do is not about exploring. It is at the front end of that, and to give people the information they need to make decisions about whether they make applications for exploration licences or whether they decide to look in a particular area for a particular product. Our job is not to find particular resource products or particular deposits. The information we provide is not about specific deposits, but generally about scientific information, geoscientific information, to assist people to develop their exploration models and their programs.

**Mr DUNHAM:** So it is to assist the industry and to facilitate it?

**Mr CARROLL:** Absolutely. To provide sufficient information for the industry to be able to make decisions to explore.

**Mr DUNHAM:** So you would be making policy decisions across the mining sector in this particular output group?

**Mr VATSKALIS:** As Mr Carroll said, our intention is to facilitate the industry and we do anything possible to facilitate the industry, and as Mr Carroll said, we are not doing the exploration, the industry does exploration; we provide information.

**Mr DUNHAM:** No, I just want to know what you are doing.

**Mr VATSKALIS:** Our policy is to increase the exploration in the Territory. We believe firmly that if we do not have exploration we are not going to have mines in the future. Our policy is, and I believe it, that the Territory is vastly unexplored and we would like to facilitate exploration. We know that there is significant exploration taking place in Western Australia where every year about \$450m is invested in mineral exploration only, and only around \$50m is invested in the Territory. But because of the department's facilitation and information provided, the generic information we provide, we now see more people interested in actually exploring in the Territory.

**Mr DUNHAM:** Good. My question is: if the government wants advice on mining issues, would it come from this particular output area?

**Mr CARROLL:** On mining issues, it depends on the issue.

**Mr DUNHAM:** Generic.

**Mr CARROLL:** Well no, it depends on the issue. If it is about exploration, NT Geological Survey which is covered by this Output Group would provide the information, but if it is about a mining activity it would be from another group. There are a whole range ...

**Mr DUNHAM:** I am talking about policy advice on mining, for instance; changing the act.

**Mr CARROLL:** The changing of the *Mining Act*, which is the one that governs title would come from this area – no sorry, it comes from Output 3. Both bits come from Output 3; the *Mining Act* and the mining management.

**Mr DUNHAM:** I will put the question and you can tell me whether I should defer it to the next one. We had the Treasurer in here talking about portability of long service leave, and he has actually set a date of January 2005 to start this up. He has not actually defined it yet and he was unable to tell us in any event what areas it captured. However, there is significant concern that it might capture the mining industry. Are you aware that this proposal is on foot? Do you believe it will have an impact on the mining industry? Have you told government the level of that impact?

**Mr VATSKALIS:** Member for Drysdale, it has not been discussed with my portfolio yet. I believe that there was the possibility that the Treasurer was not referring to the mining industry, but certainly if there is an effect on the mining industry, there will be discussions with the industry and with my department in order to establish the portability of long service leave. My understanding is that it actually refers to a totally different industry.

**Mr DUNHAM:** So can I get a guarantee from you that the portability of long service leave, which will be implemented January next year, will have no impact on the mining industry?

**Mr VATSKALIS:** No, I said before, we are going to discuss if there is any effect on the mining industry, if mining is going to be involved. The people who are working in the industry, my department, but it is my understanding that this particular area is not related to the mining industry.

**Mr DUNHAM:** So at the current stage, we do not believe that it does capture the mining industry, and if it does, what device would we use to alert the mining industry, and the opposition for instance ...

**Mr VATSKALIS:** Member for Drysdale, if something like that is going to affect the industry, it is only natural that industry is going to be involved. We always involve the industry when we develop policy.

**Mr DUNHAM:** We only have six months. I will rest with your assurance that they are not captured by it, but I will be entirely surprised if they are, because there are some discussions that that could be the case.

I have no further questions on this output.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** Do any members of the committee have questions on Output 2.1, Minerals and Petroleum Resource Development Services? Member for Nelson.

**Mr WOOD:** Thank you, Mr Chairman. Minister, given that Queensland has now joined South Australia and New South Wales in legislating so that geothermal mining exploration can take place, when will the Territory take a serious look at its geothermal resources, and what has been done so far to determine the resource in the Territory?

**Mr VATSKALIS:** Thank you, member for Nelson. I recall that you asked that question in parliament before, and you asked this question last Estimates Committee. I had to go back and have a look, and ask the department to tell me if there are any areas in the Territory where we can use hot rock to provide geothermic energy. Mr Carroll, do you want to expand on that?

**Mr CARROLL:** I should preface my comment with that I am not a professional in this area, but the advice I have is that there are not sufficient resources in the Territory to justify the development of this industry at this time.

**Mr WOOD:** Through the Chair, minister, I did give a speech in Alice Springs, which was based on information we received from a professor at the ANU who is also involved in the Cooper Basin development. Certainly from that, I got the opinion that there is a fairly large area of what you might call hot rock, which for sure has not been developed or tested, but surely it would be worth us at least looking at it? I think the federal government in its energy policy has given more money to the Cooper Basin development, which is on course and developing at the moment. I think the company operating it is Geodynamics. Surely it would be worth us at least spending some time and money on a non-polluting, fairly long-term power source that might have great potential for the Northern Territory.

**Mr VATSKALIS:** I am very supportive of renewable energy and non-polluting fuels, and geothermic energy as a resource that we can utilise. As you said it was untested, untried yet, so we cannot make policy on something that is untested and untried. I have no problems with my department looking further into this possibility.

**Mr WOOD:** That is okay. I am not asking you to dig a hole. The technology is developing, and that is what is happening in the Cooper's Basin at the moment.

Minister, maybe this is running off the back of the member for Drysdale's question, mining exploration expenditure in the Territory has been low for almost nine years. Why is that, given that according to the budget papers the native title right to negotiate has been cleared? Given that 232 exploration licenses were granted in the 12 months to March 2004, is that likely to improve?

**Mr VATSKALIS:** Yes, we have recently seen significant companies coming to the Territory, and using the right to negotiate have actually accessed land for exploration. Sweet Pea is one of them, looking for petrochemicals. In addition, we have seen a new willingness from land councils to negotiate access to Aboriginal land. Only the other day, I launched one of the books produced by my department, in cooperation of the Northern Land Council and the Central Land Council, and that is a booklet that provides all the information that you need in order to be able to access land for mineral explorations. As I said before, the department is facilitating companies to come to Territory for exploration. The land councils now, especially the Central Land Council, are willing to assist companies to access land for exploration. I can only hope more companies will come to Territory, because now the way is clear for them to proceed with exploration.

**Mr WOOD:** Minister, the budget paper, NT Economy, page 75, says that only one offshore oil and gas appraisal well was drilled in 2002 and 2003, and one exploration well. That is in the Timor Sea area. That is a huge drop off from the late 1990s. Do you know why?

**Mr VATSKALIS:** Mr Carroll.

**Mr CARROLL:** Minister, the exploration in the Timor Sea depends on a number of factors, including the global strategies of the companies that have the leases in that area, the work they have already undertaken, and the work they plan to do. There are one or two who have not done what they said they would do and we are working on them. The reason it has dropped off is because people have not put plans in, generally.

**Mr WOOD:** Minister, on page 2 of the Business Highlights there is \$2.2m allocated for *Building the Territory's Resource Base*. What exactly does that mean, how will the money be spent, who is responsible for the program, who is evaluating it to determine if this money is well spent and achieving what it is supposed to achieve?

**Mr VATSKALIS:** As you are aware, member for Nelson, and as I said during my speech, the Northern Territory government has allocated \$15.2m for exploration and investment. *Building the Territory's Resource Base* commenced on 1 July 2003. It is a four year program. It continues to acquire high



quality, competitive, geoscientific data, and has the capability to process and manage exploration and mining tenures; a commitment to work with the mining industry and indigenous organisations to encourage partnerships and indigenous involvement; and a continued program of communication to promote the Northern Territory as an attractive exploration and investment destination; and conducting geological surveys. It is a combination of promoting the Territory. As I said before, many people know about the gas and oil potential of the Territory offshore. Not many people outside Australia know about the Territory's potential in minerals. My departmental officials attended mining expos in Canada in order to promote the Territory, and will continue to do so. For more details, Mr Carroll will provide more information.

**Mr CARROLL:** In terms of evaluation, because the program has only been going since 1 July last year, it is too early yet to give you precise details of evaluation, but there are processes in place to ensure that we can demonstrate to government more widely the outcomes that we get from the program.

**Mr WOOD:** Minister, on page 19 of Business Highlights, it says that funds have been provided to relocate officers under the Indigenous Mining and Industry Services group to the regions. What does it do; how many officers are there; are they all Aboriginal people; which regions will they go to, and are Minerals and Energy Knowledge Building Programs the same as Education Programs?

**Mr VATSKALIS:** Mr Carroll will answer that.

**Mr CARROLL:** I will try to answer all of those bits if I can, Mr Wood, and let me know which bits I miss. The Indigenous Mining and Industry Services Branch of the department, which is responsible for delivering these programs, is located in Darwin with, I think, five officers; I can count them and give to you separately. There is one officer in Tennant Creek, and there is one person currently and a vacant position in Alice Springs. In relation to your question about how many indigenous employees are there in the group, we have two currently, one temporary one has just finished, and we have a trainee who is working in that area at the moment who is indigenous.

In terms of what they do, their charter is to visit communities, to explain to communities what mining means, to show people on communities and in schools, right through to community council members, what the activity of exploration and mining means on their country. To do that we have a series of - I was going to say props, but that is not the right word - but we have three dimensional models that they can show traditional owners and other people in communities what mining means; what impact exploration has; when we talk about seismic exploration, what that means; if we talk about an open pit mine, what that means; how we rehabilitate a mine, and all those sorts of issues, so that when traditional owners are involved in the process of considering applications for activity on their land, they can be informed and make an informed decision about what it is they are being asked to do by the industry in the way of exploration.

**Mr VATSKALIS:** It also includes rehabilitation and shows indigenous people how we can rehabilitate, and whether we look after the mine that has been rehabilitated.

**Mr WOOD:** Okay. It sounds like a good program.

**Mr CARROLL:** It is a good program, and I would be happy to give members more information if they would like it.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** Any more questions on that output? That concludes the committee's consideration ...

**Mr DUNHAM:** I have one quick one. The Commonwealth government's energy policy that they have released, can you tell us the ramifications for those monies that have been put into that budget; whether we are bidding on them and in which areas? That is the Commonwealth energy program they have recently announced ...

**Mr CARROLL:** Yes, their renewable energy.

**Mr DUNHAM:** There are some hundreds of millions there. Have you bid on it?

**Mr VATSKALIS:** Yes, their renewable energy?

**Mr DUNHAM:** Yes. I am just wondering whether we have a program to bid on it ...

**Mr CARROLL:** Oh, absolutely!

**Mr DUNHAM:** ... and in which areas?

**Mr CARROLL:** Most of the money is spent in regional areas. The minister might like to ...

**Mr DUNHAM:** Solar?

**Mr CARROLL:** It is mostly solar, simply because ...

**Mr DUNHAM:** Is it the old money, or is this a new ...

**Mr CARROLL:** It is a long-term program that goes over about 10 years. We get a very significant amount of money out of that ...

**Mr DUNHAM:** No, I am aware with what was done in King's Canyon, Bulman and places like that ...

**Mr CARROLL:** Yes, all of these.

**Mr DUNHAM:** What I am saying is, in addition to that, is there a new direction we can take?

**Mr CARROLL:** We are looking at the directions we are going in renewable energy, but the current funding programs are really only those solar energy programs. We have looked at wind power in the past, for example, and the technical studies have indicated that there is really nowhere in the Territory that has sufficient wind velocity for sufficient amount of time. At Tennant Creek, there were some studies, I think, about 10 or 15 years ago on the Barkly to see whether there were opportunities for wind power, and there are not. I do not think we have any tidal power opportunities either, simply because of the configuration of our coast. We do not have the opportunities that Western Australia has, for instance.

**Mr VATSKALIS:** We are looking forward to actually claiming all of the \$40m rebate that the federal government is going to provide by 2010. We are working to it. In 2003-04, the rebate we were paid was \$3.6m, and in 2004-05, we estimate that it will be about \$4.5m. What we are concentrating on actually, is not only in indigenous communities, but also big projects like King's Canyon and other projects that rely heavily upon diesel, which is an expensive way of producing energy, that we can substitute that for solar energy. It is worth it when we get the rebate.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** Are there any more questions from the committee?

**Mr DUNHAM:** Right, now we go back to exploration lines.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** No, no, no. That concludes the committee's deliberation of Output 2.1.

## **Output 2.2 – Minerals and Petroleum Resource Management Services**

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** The committee will now interrogate Output 2.2 - Minerals and Petroleum Resource Management Services. Shadow minister?

**Mr DUNHAM:** Some of these questions were answered, so I do not think we need to go all the way back. Essentially, there has been a lot of noise about additional exploration activity. The department is fully aware of the covenants of those explorers to spend certain amounts of money. The budget papers are deficient in that they only describe up to the year 2002-03. Where I was getting to when we decided that all this should not have been asked in the last one was: how come the department's activity performance measure shows the expectation for last year of 5074 mineral and petroleum titles and exploration licences administered; it dropped down to 4642. In fact, in the previous year, it had been estimated at 5200. It is quite a significant drop of 600 titles. I would just like to know whether that is an indicator, also, of a drop in expenditure and a drop in exploration activity?

**Mr VATSKALIS:** In 2003-04 you had 5074, as you said. Then the revised estimate was 4642. That is actually attributed to the cessation of a greater number of valid mineral titles. Also, the petroleum and mining industries are influenced by market forces. They are not just doing what governments tell them to do, but they are influenced by market forces. Also, from 4642 in 2003-04, we probably have 4566 in 2004-05 because a number of mining industries now have rationalised their holdings and amalgamated a number of holdings. Do you want to add anything, Mr Carroll?

**Mr CARROLL:** Minister, all I would add is that companies do rationalise. It costs them money, of course, to hold ground, because they have to pay rent. There is always an unpredictable element in forecasting how many people are going to apply, because we have no control over that. If people drop country because they no longer want it or they have changed their strategies, we cannot forecast that either. It is difficult to forecast, but there are many factors that impinge on people's decisions about whether to apply for land or to hold on to it.

**Mr DUNHAM:** Yes, but it is a worrying trend. I mean cessations are a worrying trend, that the minister talked about; world and international markets, yes, but we are still not trending at the national level so we are still not even picking up our share nationally; and it is a highly prospective area, so on that count I am also worried. On your third count about relinquishing ground so that they do not have to pay rent, suggests to me a less than optimistic view of this area compared to other areas for exploration.

**Mr VATSKALIS:** First of all I have to tell you I agree with you. We need more exploration licenses and we will do everything possible to make people aware of the potential of the Territory. Not only do the departmental officers travel, but it is our intention now to travel extensively in Australia and overseas to promote the Territory. As I said to you before, I was surprised when the American Commercial Consul told me he had no idea about the mineral possibilities of the Territory. He knew everything about gas and oil in the Arafura Sea and to the north of the Territory. The Chinese Ambassador wanted to know if we have iron ore, and how much? Have we sold it? Do we have copper? Do we have nickel? Obviously China at the moment buys anything they can put their hands on. It was surprising, I might say, that a country like China is not aware of the potential of the Territory. This is what we want to make people aware of - the Territory's businesses.

**Mr DUNHAM:** I suppose where I am getting to is that there is no doubt that native title and the uncertainties put a log jam into this particular area. We are not almost comparable with pre-native title uncertainty.

**Mr CARROLL:** If I might, minister?

**Mr VATSKALIS:** Yes.

**Mr CARROLL:** There are two issues. Half the Territory is not, of course, native title land; it is ALRA land - and there are separate issues for that. Getting back to your point though of the attractiveness of the Territory, you may or may not be aware of the Fraser Institute which is an international Canadian

think tank that has published independent data about the prospectivity of, I think, it is 56 jurisdictions around the world, and for the first time Australia has broken into the state jurisdictions. On that scale, the Territory comes out as number eight, as the most investment attractive place. The information in the international marketplace is that the Territory is a good place to do business in, but we have to translate that into real outcomes on the ground. Doing that requires a whole range of efforts including the things the minister talked about as well as things such as pre-exploration data, us making sure that the approval processes that we administer in the department are efficient and as smooth as possible, that we do not have delays and red tape where we can avoid it - and that is one reason the *Mining Act* is being reviewed at the moment to ensure that the processes we have keep us competitive in the way people deal with governments, and a whole range of issues like that. The trouble is, we can lead them to water, Mr Chairman, but we cannot make them drink when it comes to applying for land for exploration.

**Mr VATSKALIS:** Another thing, member for Drysdale, the Territory rated only below Chile, Nevada, Western Australia, Quebec, Brazil, Peru and Ontario and above all the other Australian states. In addition to that we are ranked 12th in the Policy Potential Index, measuring the effects of exploration on government policies, and 14th in the Mineral Potential Index rating on attractiveness based on perception of geological prospectivity. We are not doing badly considering that most of the other countries like Chile, Brazil and Peru are third world countries and they do not have in place the limitations we have in Australia with regard to environment and occupational health and safety, but we want to actually bring it further up the scale.

**Mr DUNHAM:** All right. I think we could be doing better. So when you say we are not doing too badly, I think we could be doing much more.

**Mr VATSKALIS:** We want to do much more.

**Mr DUNHAM:** My question now then is: if you are going to put an additional effort into this, and given that you have to nett out DCIS costs, where is this additional effort going to come from given you have a diminishing budget? Are you going to rearrange some of your work activities?

**Mr VATSKALIS:** Diminishing budget? We do not, as a matter of fact. If you compare the original budget of 2003-04 with the budget of 2004-05 there is an increase of about \$700 000 or \$800 000. The original budget in 2003-04 was \$8.4m; the budget for 2004-05 is \$9.1m. The 2003-04 revised estimates was \$9.4m but the variations relate to the increases for DCIS notional charges, increased revenue ...

**Mr DUNHAM:** Which reduces it.

**Mr VATSKALIS:** ... and off-set by decreasing overheads. Now, the revised estimate includes money that went into the budget during the year. If you want to really find out if the budget went up or down you should actually compare the revised estimates for 2003-04 with the revised estimates for 2004-05.

**Mr DUNHAM:** I am referring to your budget papers. There is a reduction in your budget. We know that we have to nett out the DCIS costs from there because they have gone in and they were not in there last year. What I am saying is you have a reduced budget and you are going to tell us you are going to go out and market the Territory as the eighth best place on the globe to market. All I am saying is: 'Good, get your passport dusted off and do it', but what are you going to cut back here or will you get new money?

**Mr VATSKALIS:** I will disagree with your statement about a reduced budget and I will let Mr Vivian give you more information about it.

**Mr VIVIAN:** The issue here is some adjustments for one-off inclusions in last year's budget that are not in the initial estimate for next year. Some of those include things like \$150 000 that was in there for external revenue for Team NT; some funds of about \$92 000 for Mt Todd rehabilitation ...

**Mr DUNHAM:** Can you point to me in the budget papers where these are as we go through?

**Mr VIVIAN:** This is in the budget paper, in this instance, part of the result that shows up \$9.142m for the output cost put through.

**Mr DUNHAM:** But the variation has not been described in here?

**Mr VIVIAN:** No, I am just giving you that variation.

**Mr DUNHAM:** Right.

**Mr VIVIAN:** To continue, there is \$114 000 of internal revenue adjustment; there are some adjustments for a decrease, in fact, for DCIS notional charges from this year to next for this particular output.

**Mr DUNHAM:** Okay, there are two points on that. The first point is we have been saying in this committee for some time that those variations should be here if they are critical to it, but they still to me indicate a lessening of your capacity to do the additional work that you have described to us.

**Mr VATSKALIS:** Member for Drysdale, I disagree. Again I say if we are going to compare budgets, let's compare real budgets; original budget for 2003-04, original budget for 2004-05. For example, for the minerals and petroleum resource development services, output 2.1, original budget for 2003-04 was \$10.6m, the budget now at the beginning of the year for 2004-05 is \$16m. The revised estimate for 2003-04 was \$15.4m. Okay, there were reasonably significant increases on the budget for the next output, minerals and petroleum resource management services. Our budget has not decreased. Our budget has actually gone up. If there are any variations, it is because money came into the budget throughout the year and the same will probably happen in 2004-05.

**Mr DUNHAM:** Yes, we have had this argument. It is ill-described. When tax goes up, the Treasurer tries to tell us that it is not a matter for discussion. Anyway, we will get off to that. We took advice in a different committee, but with some of the same persona, that there is the potential for an environmental protection agency to actually have a negative impact on mining and the potential for it to scare off employers. We heard that in evidence in Tennant Creek. Do you believe that the environmental protection agency should have a minimal impact on this industry area?

**Mr VATSKALIS:** Which budget output does this relate too?

**Mr DUNHAM:** I am relating to the policy advice that comes to government out of mining. This is what we talked about at the start of it. If the government wants to get advice on the biggest industry it has, 22% of its GDP, it comes to you.

There is a policy impact on a government decision to introduce an EPA. I am asking you if you have done an assessment as to what that might mean to prospectivity and people coming to this place and scaring away potential employers?

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** Shadow minister, the minister has raised a point of relevance. Can you tell us where the relevance is in that question? You went through and mentioned an EPA scaring away everyone, but can you tell us where it relates to minerals and petroleum resources management services? The relevance?

**Mr DUNHAM:** Okay, I will put it this way: if you believe that an EPA is irrelevant to your industry, I would be stunned. I am assuming it is relevant and I am assuming that you have done some assessments as to what impact it might have on this area that has such an enormous proportion of our GDP.

My question to you is: do you think an EPA should have a minimal impact on this area or do you think that it should have a greater impact and, if so, do you believe that that is potentially detrimental to our economy?

**Mr VATSKALIS:** Mr Burgess.

**Mr BURGESS:** The department has made a submission to the parliamentary committee that is looking at the establishment of an EPA. I think we submitted that in the last fortnight. In making that submission, we did actually consult with the industry, so we were aware of their views, and we included them in that submission. In that submission we looked to other jurisdictions, how those models were handled, what different models there were, and provided the committee with what we considered was an objective view of the limitations and the benefits of all those systems so that they would be able to take those on board in forming their recommendations. The degree to which an organisation like an EPA would have an impact on an industry, or on a community or whatever, will depend, to a large extent, on what the final powers of that organisation are. I guess that would be a matter for government at the end of the day to determine.

**Mr DUNHAM:** So, you would be arguing for a minimalist model?

**Mr BURGESS:** We presented a number of different models in the submission that we made, to give what we hoped was objective advice about what the impacts of any of those models would be.

**Mr VATSKALIS:** We have an Environment Committee at the moment enquiring about the possible introduction of an EPA. There is no government decision yet. The committee is travelling around the Territory, obtaining opinions, talking to departments. After all, the EPA, if it is going to be established, is not going to impact only on the mining industry. It is going to impact on a number of industries, and I think all industries should be consulted. The government has not made a decision yet. The government will listen to the outcome of the committee and consider the different options, the inputs, and then they will make a decision.

**Mr DUNHAM:** I would draw your attention, though, to your fiscal strategy, which applies across every budget area. I will quote to you from page 3 of Budget Paper No 2, that in formulating, the government must:

*Formulate and apply spending and taxation policies, having regard to the effect of these policies on employment, economic prosperity and the development of the Territory economy.*

I am just seeking your assurance that the mining would be well and truly represented in each of those areas - employment, economic prosperity, and development - in formulating whatever the final decision of government is.

**Mr VATSKALIS:** As Mr Burgess said, the views of the mining community have been incorporated in the submission of the department to the parliamentary committee.

**Mr DUNHAM:** Okay. Polygon claims, minister. Are you aware of the effect these claims are having on the pastoral industry as a result of the mining activities on pastoral leases?

**Mr VATSKALIS:** We are aware there are some situations with the so-called polygon claims. I am also aware that currently the Department of Justice is dealing with these issues, because there are some cases before the courts, between claimants and people from the pastoral industry. I will call on one of my officials who is an expert on native title, Mr Whitfield.

**Mr WHITFIELD:** Jerry Whitfield, Director of Titles. Could you repeat the question, please.

**Mr DUNHAM:** Yes, basically just an explanation of the new phenomena of polygon claims, particularly insofar as it is a native title claim on an exploration area, but it will have a big impact on the pastoral industry. I am just looking at your analysis of this phenomenon.

**Mr WHITFIELD:** Polygon claims is a term under the *Native Title Act*. They are a native title claim which were lodged in response to exploration licence applications that had been notified in accordance with the *Native Title Act*.

**Mr DUNHAM:** And coinciding with the boundaries.

**Mr WHITFIELD:** And coinciding with the boundaries, which are rectangular, hence the name polygon claims. Once a native title claim has been lodged, there is a process, and depending on the result of that process, the exploration licence will be granted or not granted. However, once the grant of the title has occurred, and even after perhaps the title has ceased, the claim remains over the pastoral estate. I do not know how many exactly of those claims but there are approximately something in the order of 100-odd claims over pastoral estate. The majority ...

**Mr DUNHAM:** As the application lapses, whereas they reduce country or cease, the status of the claim remains on the pastoral lease.

**Mr WHITFIELD:** That is right. It is still a native title claim; and that native title claim needs to be determined through the federal court process under the *Native Title Act*. I am aware, once the exploration licence process is granted, from the Minerals and Energy point of view there is no interest in that residing claim. That is a federal court matter, although I am aware that Department of Justice is, through the Native Title Tribunal in federal court, seeking to resolve those claims.

**Mr DUNHAM:** Does it impede the mining tenement application? Does that have to wait for the Native Title Tribunal determination?

**Mr WHITFIELD:** Sorry, the exploration licence or the ...

**Mr DUNHAM:** The exploration licence. Is that held in abeyance pending the outcome of the determination?

**Mr WHITFIELD:** No, it is not, no. For an exploration licence, it is processed under what they call the expedited procedure'. It gives the native title claimants a right to object to that claim. Now, that objection may be resolved either within the tribunal or outside the tribunal. However, once it is resolved, the title will be granted - that is the exploration licence title - and proceeded at the same course under the *Mining Act*.

**Mr DUNHAM:** Okay. So, the native title applications are proceeding well on the basis that many of them have no objections lodged? Is that right?

**Mr WHITFIELD:** Sorry, the exploration licence applications at present?

**Mr DUNHAM:** Yes.

**Mr WHITFIELD:** That is correct. There is, I think, one objection in the tribunal at the moment.

**Mr DUNHAM:** It is a system that, once it was put in place, actually did not clear the log jam?

**Mr WHITFIELD:** Yes, that is correct.

**Mr DUNHAM:** All right. The objections are determined within what period?

**Mr WHITFIELD:** Speaking from memory, we have not had an objection determined through the tribunal in the last 12 months. Any objections that have been lodged in the last 12 months have been withdrawn, usually because of negotiations between the licence holders and the claimants. When the process was going through the Native Title Tribunal, the objections, initially, were taking some six to eight months to resolve, and that reduced to something in the order of six months from the time the objection was lodged to the time the objection was determined.

**Mr DUNHAM:** As far as the mining industry is concerned, native title process through that channel is neither expensive nor excessively time consuming?

**Mr WHITFIELD:** That is correct, in terms of exploration licences, as against mining tenements.

**Mr DUNHAM:** I am working from fairly aged data here, minister. Can we have a matrix of all of those, tracking it, because it was a pretty handy resource to look at how applications were being resolved, and the type that turns up in your annual report that shows Northern Land Council, Central Land Council, Tiwi, Anindilyakwa - whether they had been objected or not, expedited process ...

**Mr VATSKALIS:** It will be included in next year's annual report, member for Drysdale, but if you want it earlier ...

**Mr DUNHAM:** It is fairly aged.

**Mr VATSKALIS:** ... I can organise to forward a copy of it. You do not expect to have one now, do you?

**Mr DUNHAM:** No, just send me a copy is fine.

**Mr VATSKALIS:** Okay. Mentioning some of the mineral explorations, things work both ways. I have been advised that the Tiwi Land Council now, at a request of Aboriginal traditional owners, have agreed to lift the moratorium for mineral exploration of the Tiwi Islands, which is a significant step forward. Nine new applications for exploration licences have been now lodged as a result.

**Mr DUNHAM:** That is excellent news.

**Mr VATSKALIS:** That is significant news.

**Mr DUNHAM:** We were talking specifically then about exploration licences. Can you tell me about mining tenements now? About mining leases? Is it a similar experience?

**Mr WHITFIELD:** The process of granting mining tenements is a slightly different process in terms of where native title claims are lodged. There is actually a requirement to negotiate with exploration licences. It is more of an objection that needs to be determined. There is no provision, I guess, for that objection process under the mining tenement situation. We have, over the past 12 months or so, been scrutinizing the outstanding mineral lease applications and mineral claim applications, and a number of those applicants have withdrawn their title applications because of, I guess, either a lack of interest, perhaps a change in commodity prices, but also because of concerns about the process.

**Mr DUNHAM:** It was just too hard; is that why they withdrew?

**Mr WHITFIELD:** Exactly. We have selected a number of the higher priority mineral lease applications. In some instances, the companies are negotiating directly with the land council and they prefer the government to effectively stay on the side line in those negotiations. In another application, we are working with the applicants and the land council through a title tribunal mediation process to obtain grant.



**Mr VATSKALIS:** We have some more information, member for Drysdale. There are currently some 160 mining tenement applications pending processing to grant. Approximately 40% of them I expect to be granted under Indigenous Land Use Agreements, so that is good news. The government also has negotiated an ILUA with the Central Land Council for the Kurundi pastoral lease, and now we grant mineral claims and about 17 titles are going to be involved. Of course, the the Bootu Creek manganese mine is currently under negotiations and the Mount Porter gold mine in Pine Creek.

**Mr DUNHAM:** Can we turn now to ALRA, the *Aboriginal Lands Right Act* process. Last time we met as an Estimates Committee and talked to the then minister, we talked about a submission that was on foot to the Commonwealth government to make the act better, more conducive to mining. He gave an undertaking that he would be seeking the advice of the industry through the normal peak body. I was disappointed to find that that was not as fulsome a communication as it could have been. Can I ask you, minister, if you are engaging with the industry through the peak body in your negotiations with the Commonwealth government on the *Aboriginal Land Rights Act* or whether that includes them coming with you on trips to talk to ministers and mounting joint submissions?

**Mr VATSKALIS:** John, can you comment on that.

**Mr CARROLL:** Where that is at, member for Drysdale, is that the Northern Territory government did make its submission to the Commonwealth. I honestly cannot remember where it was in the cycle or whether it was prior to - I think it was after last estimates. Where it is at, at the moment is the Commonwealth is considering its position and we do not have anything firm back from the Commonwealth in the way of what the Commonwealth proposes to do in terms of amendments. When it does, I presume the government will then consider the matter and decided how to handle it. I suggest that is one for you minister, rather than me.

**Mr DUNHAM:** I guess I am talking about process. As this unfolds and negotiates, I am asking whether the peak body could be a firm player, a firm partner, in those negotiations, including exchanges of information about where the process is up to?

**Mr VATSKALIS:** Any time that something that we are actually doing is going to affect the industry, the peak body is included in the consultation and negotiation. The other thing we did was that we had a number of amendments and we are actually having to review the *Mining Act* and will invite the peak body and other key players to comment and to provide input. We intend to do the same thing with ALRA.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** Any other questions from the committee?

**Mr WOOD:** Are we still on 2.2?

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** Yes.

**Mr WOOD:** Minister, Mt Todd was just mentioned and I have a question. Where in the budget do you find the allocation for the rehabilitation of the Mt Todd gold mine site?

**Mr VATSKALIS:** Mr Carroll.

**Mr CARROLL:** I am not sure. Mr Vivien can tell you precisely. While he is looking I will explain the concept. There is \$200 000 or thereabouts in a trust fund that was the money that came from when the operations closed four years ago or so. We are spending that money to maintain the site and to ensure that there is no environmental damage outside the area of the mineral lease. It is expected that that money will last at least until the end of next financial year so that there is no need for an allocation in this budget to cover that.

**Mr WOOD:** We heard at an EPA meeting in Katherine that there was leakage in the dam wall. Would

be able to comment on whether that was true or not?

**Mr CARROLL:** There is range of issues at the site - sorry, minister.

**Mr VATSKALIS:** Yes, go on.

**Mr CARROLL:** ... which need to be addressed. We have a person on-site. I have no reports that say there is a major leakage in the dam wall. There is an issue with the dam wall that is being addressed at the moment, but none of it goes off-site and none of it goes into the Edith River system.

**Mr WOOD:** I don't think the person regarded it as a major leak, but minor leaks.

**Mr CARROLL:** All of those issues are under constant monitoring. I might add, if I may, Mr Chairman, that we have a regular system of meetings with the Jawoyn on-site where we review all the activity, the way the site is managed and to ensure that not only are we not endangering the environment, but that we are working with the traditional owners of the country to ensure that their objectives are being met as well as those of the environment.

**Mr WOOD:** Thank you, minister. Minister, what is the department predicting will be the final cost to taxpayers of the Mt Todd rehabilitation?

**Mr VATSKALIS:** Member for Nelson, I cannot give you a prediction because I cannot read a crystal ball. My understanding is that if the mine does not operate again, so an unproductive mine takes care of all these issues, the impact to the Territory taxpayers would be multi-millions.

**Mr DUNHAM:** Multi-millions?

**Mr VATSKALIS:** Yes.

**Mr WOOD:** So would \$20m sound about right?

**Mr VATSKALIS:** It sounds reasonable to me, but, once again, it might sound reasonable now but we do not know the development of new techniques and the way that we address some of the issues and if the mine becomes operational. If the mine becomes operational and we have negotiations with the people who currently have control of the mine and people who are interested in the mine, a number of these problems will not exist, will be resolved, so the cost of rehabilitation will become significantly smaller.

**Mr WOOD:** Is that unlikely considering that most of the plant has nearly been sold?

**Mr VATSKALIS:** It is a commercial decision the company has to make because we are aware that there are not only gold deposits in Mt Todd, but in the area around it and there are some people who are interested in acquiring the mine to extract gold but also to rehabilitate the mine at the same time like they do at the Peko rehabilitation project in Tennant Creek.

**Mr WOOD:** Many of these questions are about rehabilitation, minister. Has the mines department or your environment department assessed the Ranger uranium mine to estimate the cost of rehabilitation, given that the mine will close in the next few years?

**Mr VATSKALIS:** Mr Carroll.

**Mr CARROLL:** If I may, minister, there is a whole range of mechanisms in place for dealing with the Ranger mine, including rehabilitation bonds and a whole range of plans that are very detailed and are about ensuring two things: one, that the current operation does not impact on the environment; and second, when the current operation finishes - and I think mining finishes in 2009 at the current site,

with production ceasing a year or two after that – that in that whole process, rehabilitation takes place and it leaves the site in a position that will not impact on the environment in the long term.

**Mr WOOD:** Minister, does the Territory government hold a rehabilitation bond from ERA or Rio Tinto for the mine?

**Mr VATSKALIS:** Yes, it does. It is much higher than the Mt Todd one, significantly higher. Mr Carroll might be able to give you the bond book.

**Mr VIVIAN:** Member for Nelson, if I could just go back, you asked where in the budget books the Mt Todd revenues show up. On page 306 of Budget Paper No 3, there is a line there for Department of Business, Industry and Resource Development that deals with general provisions. In that 202 for this year is included \$100 000 for Mt Todd, remembering that we bring new revenue to account out of the trust account as it is needed, but that is the estimate for this coming year.

**Mr WOOD:** You can see why budgets are hard to – I have to get up to page 306 and see a line which says 'general provisions'.

**Mr DUNHAM:** What is that, the general provisions line, is it, the one that has 202?

**Mr VIVIAN:** Yes.

**Mr DUNHAM:** And you are saying the \$100 000 has come out of that?

**Mr CARROLL:** \$100 000 is incorporated in that.

**Mr DUNHAM:** So where do these other ones go?

**Mr WOOD:** I was going to ask that, too.

**Mr CARROLL:** Sorry, I cannot easily find that figure.

**Mr WOOD:** The other question is they are all about rehabilitation, etcetera. Are there other mine sites that need rehabilitating?

**Mr VATSKALIS:** Yes, member for Nelson. There are a number of mines in the Northern Territory, old ones and new ones. The new ones are in the new provisions of the act. They have to put an environmental bond in place. Some of them date 30, 40, 50 years back. They do not have a bond because, at the time, the legislation did not require a bond. Some legacy mine sites have been rehabilitated, some of them better than others. But there are others that have been just left as they were, and people moved away 50 years ago.

**Mr WOOD:** Of those older sites that were around before bonds were required, are any of those likely to cause environmental or public risk?

**Mr VATSKALIS:** The department actually monitors the legacy mine sites, to try to find out if they are going to pose any risks. Some of them are probably holes in the ground that have never been filled. They were left like that. Others are actually currently operating, and the operation actually reduces, believe it or not, the pollution effect of the mine site. Others that have been abandoned before now are actually being reworked in the new way of reworking general operations of mines, so there is no question of rehabilitation until the new mine site closes down. We also found out that some of the new mines that are re-opened, the company that takes over acquires the responsibility and the liability as well.

**Mr WOOD:** When we were on the Environmental and Sustainable Development Committee tour of Peko and Belmincka I mentioned those sorts of things. What does the department do to make sure rehabilitation is done to the required standard?

**Mr VATSKALIS:** If a new mine opens, they have to put up all the necessary documentation. They have to undergo a rigorous environmental process before the operation commences, and certainly a

rehabilitation plan. At the end they have to comply with the white discussion paper.

**Mr WOOD:** Minister, are there occasions where a mine does not have to hold a rehabilitation bond?

**Mr VATSKALIS:** New mines are required to hold a rehabilitation bond.

**Mr WOOD:** I have a list of ten mines here. Would I be able to get a copy of the bond list? Is that a public document, instead of me asking one after the other?

**Mr VATSKALIS:** We can always provide the information of the bonds for the sum of the year.

**Mr WOOD:** Who assesses the size of the rehabilitation bond?

**Mr CARROLL:** The department advises the minister, and it is determined, I think, under delegation from the minister, depending on the size of the bond.

**Mr WOOD:** Who actually works it out, or how is it calculated?

**Mr CARROLL:** There is a formula and a series of requirements in the *Mining Management Act*, and we go through a process of making this assessment. There are a whole lot of risk factors that are taken into account, and the bottom line is the number.

**Mr WOOD:** Has any company ever been sued for failing to meet their rehabilitation requirements in the Territory?

**Mr CARROLL:** Minister, I have difficulty in answering that because I have only been in this job for 18 months, and I cannot give you the whole history as to whether anybody has been sued or not.

**Mr WOOD:** Your right hand man shakes his head.

**A member:** Meaning I don't know.

**Mr CARROLL:** I think not. The current bonding arrangements came in with the *Mining Management Act* that came into effect on 1 January 2002. The previous legislation did not have the same requirements and the same regime as we have now, so to compare what happened before the current act, and what happens now, are apples and oranges. Since the current act has been in force, as far as I am aware, there have been no prosecutions.

**Mr WOOD:** I also have a list of about 15 mines that were closed, minister. I was going to ask whether a rehabilitation bond was put down for each of them, but I wonder whether it would save time, and it would be better, if I could give you the list?

**Mr VATSKALIS:** If you provide us with a list, we will answer it. But, again, you have to remember if these mines operated before 2002, there were no requirements or different requirements.

**Mr WOOD:** That is right.

**Mr CARROLL:** Most of them will be.

**Mr WOOD:** Yes, that is okay.

**Mr CARROLL:** Minister and Chairman, if I can just go back to the question about the bond for Ranger, we are currently doing a check, but our view is that it is about \$25m. Before the committee rises today, we will have you a figure that is precisely what the bond is for Ranger.

**Mr WOOD:** Minister, what is the total sum of money held by the department or the government for rehabilitation bonds?

**Mr VATSKALIS:** Again, we can provide this information to you later.

**Mr CARROLL:** It is not as easy as that, minister, if I might. Many of the bonds we hold are bank guarantees, which mean we do not hold the money. There are technical issues about where the money is and who owns it. The way it is held is so that we can access it if we need it. If the bank holds it, the term of the bond is such that if we call the money we get it for rehabilitation purposes. However, we do not actually have the money in the government's bank accounts. We can give you figures that talk about what we have in the way of commitments - and they are iron clad commitments - but they are not money that is in the budget.

**Mr WOOD:** No, that is fine. If I could have ...

**Mr VATSKALIS:** Yes.

**Mr WOOD:** Thank you, Mr Chairman.

**Dr LIM:** Mr Chairman, continuing from the member for Nelson's question about Jabiru. Are you, minister, exercising your mind on what is going to happen to Jabiru - the township and the people living in that area - with the mine closing down, and maybe power not being available?

**Mr VATSKALIS:** Member for Greateorex, my understanding is that this issue is not in my portfolio. It is probably has to do with Community Development, Sport and Cultural Affairs rather than Mines and Energy. However, my understanding is that there are currently negotiations and discussions with the community of Jabiru - the Jabiru community and the broader community - about what is going to happen when and if the mine closes. Once again, it is one mine in the Territory currently operating and, probably, if it closes, it will close in 10 or 15 years time. In 10 or 15 years time, we do not know what is going to happen.

**Dr LIM:** Your CEO just said that it will close in about six years' time.

**Mr VATSKALIS:** Six years' time is a prediction but, again, depends how much you are able to find within the boundaries of the mine.

**Dr LIM:** I think the industry will tell you the same thing as your CEO is telling you.

**Mr VATSKALIS:** Things change from one day to the another, especially depending on the demand for, and the price of, uranium ...

**Dr LIM:** Which is going up.

**Mr VATSKALIS:** Again, the issue you asked was what happened at Jabiru. I agree with you, it something that is being considered by a number of people and groups in the Jabiru area and the Kakadu area.

**Dr LIM:** Minister, you say that the mine is not going to close for another 10 or 15 years. Do you think that you can leave that decision about Jabiru to a later stage, because it is not going to worry you?

**Mr VATSKALIS:** No, that is why there are people now talking about the future of Jabiru.

**Dr LIM:** Are you and your department thinking about it as well?

**Mr VATSKALIS:** I remind you that my department is the Department of Mines and Energy. My department has to think, if and when the mine closes, about its rehabilitation. Some of the social issues are actually more appropriate to be dealt with by CDSCA, rather than Department of Mines and Energy.

**Dr LIM:** Your CEO just told you that it is going to be about six years from now.

**Mr VATSKALIS:** That is a prediction we have, six years. As I have said to your before, that depends on many factors. There is no cut-off date such as on 1 January 2010 it is going to close down.

**Dr LIM:** Okay. In that regard, with the imminent closure of Jabiru, what happens with Jabiluka? Is the department considering the issues with Jabiluka?

**Mr VATSKALIS:** That is a question that has to be addressed to the company, because the company, Rio Tinto, made a decision about Jabiluka. They are not going to open Jabiluka unless they have the agreement with the traditional owners.

**Dr LIM:** I understand that perfectly well, that is private enterprise. But, surely as a government department, you have to be prepared in the event that the company makes a decision to go ahead with the reopening of the mine. What preparation have you done in that regard?

**Mr VATSKALIS:** Mr Carroll.

**Mr CARROLL:** Thank you, minister. The question of Jabiluka is, of course, one for ERA and Rio Tinto and other shareholders of ERA. We are aware of the circumstances at Jabiluka. We supervise the work that happened recently for the filling of the decline, and we are in a position, if the company decides to recommence mining, to work through all the issues that are there.

We have a lot of information already from the work that has already been done. We are in a position to work with the company. The reality is that the company will not decide overnight to start mining again, so there is time to gear up and to do things. If I could just add to what the minister said before about the preparations for Jabiru, I am aware that the company, the government and the community, there is a very active committee that is working very, very hard on getting solutions that are acceptable for the people of Jabiru, the traditional owners and all the people of interest in that area. There is a significant amount of work going on even as we talk.

**Mr VATSKALIS:** Also we have to involve the Commonwealth. Let us not forget the Commonwealth is a stakeholder in the whole issue of Jabiru.

**Dr LIM:** Perfectly well. Minister, through you to your CEO, does he agree with the minister that it is going to be 15 years before Jabiru is going to be entirely ...

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** Member ...

**Dr LIM:** I am asking the minister ...

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** Yes, just the minister. If he wants to, he can redirect it to the CEO.

**Mr VATSKALIS:** Apart from the fact of the closure of the mine has nothing to with the budget, member for Greatorex, 10 to 15 years ...

**Dr LIM:** It is on mining, your department, your own ...

**Mr VATSKALIS:** If you show me which output it relates to, I am prepared to answer it.

**Dr LIM:** It relates to the department's work. It supervises the mine, and is therefore a budget commitment in your portfolio. What are you talking about 'Where is the line'?

**Mr VATSKALIS:** No, no, where is the line telling me that it will close in 10 to 15 years?

**Dr LIM:** No, you just said that yourself!

**Mr VATSKALIS:** That was a hypothetical dateline that the mine is not going to close in a year, it is going to close in the future; six, 10, 15 years. As I said to you before, the company said it would close down in six years based on current predictions. But again, how can we say what is going to be found next year or the year after? Let us not forget that the Tennant Creek gold mines closed a few years back and now we have see a very, very active gold mine industry in Tennant Creek because new companies found new deposits in old mines.

**Dr LIM:** Okay, now you have said it is six, 10 or 15. Previously, you know ...

**Mr VATSKALIS:** Ten or 15 was a hypothetical figure.

**Dr LIM:** Okay.

**Mr DUNHAM:** Back to the environment committee, we had various evidence given to us about the department's regulatory, supervisory, audit-type regime. From the industry, particularly the practitioners who have worked in other places, to your credit, there are great accolades for the work of your mines inspectors. But there was also much evidence given that it was a toothless tiger. The department rarely prosecuted, rarely forced compliance. This evidence came from parties that might have had an anti-mine bigotry, I do not know. Do you believe the regulatory regime you have is sufficient, the acts that you have are sufficient? Do you believe that the legislative power that you have is sufficient to enforce compliance? Is there any additional requirement and power that you need legislatively?

**Mr VATSKALIS:** Member for Drysdale, I asked my department to provide me with a schedule of their inspections that they have done in the past so I could have a look at what they have done, where and when, and a schedule of visits in the future. I was satisfied with what they gave me. However, sometimes it is not only the ability of the inspector to conduct their job properly. It is sometimes just the will of the government to enforce legislation. There might be some deficiencies in the *Mining Act* and that is what we actually intend to address with the review of the *Mining Act*.

I have said before, publicly, that my intention is to enforce the act all over the Territory. I believe that the mining industry is very healthy and very good and very conscious. I have personally had a look at some of the accidents taking place in mining areas in the Territory and most of them are not serious accidents. They are accidents that require people to take time of work but they are not life threatening or anything. However, we had incidents like the ERA incident which I would view as serious. People investigated it, and were also prepared to work with the company to help bring back the standards to where they were before. I give you a commitment that my department is going to enforce the legislation. We are going to have an industry that complies with the legislation and if people blatantly disregard the law they are going to be taken to task.

**Mr DUNHAM:** So, you believe the legislation is sufficient ...

**Mr VATSKALIS:** No, I said that there are some deficiencies we are going to address because we are reviewing the *Mining Act*.

**Mr DUNHAM:** ... and you believe, as an industry, they are generally compliant ...

**Mr VATSKALIS:** I believe that they are generally compliant.

**Mr DUNHAM:** ... and that the accident notifications you get are generally on the less serious side, and you believe that if the mine is found to have some degree of responsibility that you will use the punitive sections in the act. Is that a good summary?

**Mr VATSKALIS:** I am prepared to use the act the same way we use other inspectors using their own act, and I believe the list of people for accident notification that we receive shows that we do not have deaths. We have injuries, but most of these are in the lower range of seriousness.

**Mr DUNHAM:** That is in your manual. Can you give me an indication which areas of the act you think need beefing up?

**Mr VATSKALIS:** I cannot pinpoint which particular area for the simple reason that we are working on the whole act when we look at the *Mining Management Act*, and there will be input from the industry – the industry has identified issues that they wish to have rectified and so has my department. There will be a public consultation process.

**Mr DUNHAM:** Okay.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** Are there any more questions on Output 2.2, Mineral and Petroleum Resource Management Services? That being the case, I will close that output.

**Mr WOOD:** Can I just ask the question before you close that off? Are you going to have non-specific questions?

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** Sure are.

**Mr WOOD:** You have to be quick with this.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** That concludes consideration of this output group.

#### **Non-Output Specific Budget Related Questions**

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** Might I just remind committee members that these are non-output specific budget related questions in regard to this particular output, not roaming all over the portfolio. Shadow minister?

**Mr DUNHAM:** No, straight to you, Gerry.

**Mr WOOD:** I have asked this of other ministers, but I need to ask it of you. On page 300 of Budget Paper No 3, we find the sale of goods and services revenue. It says the Territory will earn \$700 000 from offshore petroleum rents in 2004-05. Will the Territory lose out on future similar income from the Greater Sunrise gas field after the federal government's unitisation legislation removed the Northern Territory's powers in relation to those waters?

**Mr VATSKALIS:** For all offshore rents or permits in the waters administered by the Northern Territory government, the Territory collects and retains all offshore rent payments due to the Commonwealth. This compensates for issuing and administering offshore petroleum leases on the Commonwealth's behalf. There has been a reduction in rental revenue and that is a consequence of the funding restructure and the creation of the National Offshore Petroleum Safety Authority, NOPSA, a Commonwealth statutory authority. On 1 January 2005, all the offshore safety functions currently the responsibility of the Territory government will be transferred to NOPSA. The Northern Territory government will continue to administer petroleum leases and environmental matters after the establishment of NOPSA.



In relation to the Greater Sunrise area, the Territory now receives rent payments for the currently granted leases. The Commonwealth has indicated that the Sunrise area currently administered by the Territory will be returned to the Commonwealth's control for decision-making purposes and when the unitisation arrangements are ratified by East Timor and come into effect. However, the Northern Territory will continue to receive rental payments to cover administrative activities. The royalties from production will not be paid to the Territory; they will go to East Timor and the Commonwealth under the agreed unitisation arrangements. Currently, the rental revenue is received from Sunrise leases is \$190 000.

**Mr WOOD:** Good. So in other words, it won't make a difference to our rental income?

**Mr VATSKALIS:** No, because we receive very little. When the majority of the mega bucks arrive, they will go to into the pockets of Timor and the Commonwealth government.

**Mr WOOD:** Thank you, minister. Mr Chairman, may I table the list of mines that I quoted in my questions so the minister can have those?

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** If you so desire.

**Mr WOOD:** The questions are attached to it so that you know what they are about.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** Is that a question on notice?

**Mr WOOD:** I don't know. How do you handle it? I am tabling those documents because when I asked ...

**Mr VATSKALIS:** We will respond to them in the next few days.

**Mr WOOD:** I will put it on notice. Then it is on the public record.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** Do you take it on notice, minister?

**Mr VATSKALIS:** We might not be able to get all the information together by tomorrow. So just table them and we will take them and we will provide information to you in the next week or so.

**Mr WOOD:** Okay. I will table them.

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#### **Question on Notice**

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** Okay. To assist Hansard and to ensure the minister is fully aware of the question, would the member for Nelson please restate the question?

**Mr WOOD:** Minister, I have here a list of 10 operational mines in the Territory from the DBIRD web site. Can you tell me what amount of money the government holds as a rehabilitation bond for each mine or, if not a bond, any other money held for rehabilitation? If a mine incurred no bond, why not? In the case of the second list, I also have a list of 15 mines listed as closed mines on the DBIRD web site. Can you tell me whether there was a rehabilitation bond for each of them? Has each mine site been rehabilitated and, in the case of a bond not being available, who paid for the rehabilitation?

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** Minister, do you accept that as a question to be taken on notice?

**Mr VATSKALIS:** We may not be able to provide that information by close of business tomorrow, but I

will make sure that this information is provided to the member for Nelson by the end of next week.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** That being the case, I allocate number 9.1 to it.

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**Mr CHAIRMAN:** That concludes consideration of Output Group 2.0.

**OUTPUT GROUP 3.0 – Animal, Plant and Fisheries Industry Services**

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** The committee will now consider Output Group 3.0 – Animal, Plant and Fisheries Industry Services. The committee will be moving into Output 3.1, however, I have had discussions with the shadow minister and he has indicated that he wishes to ask a global budget question first off about the head figure for the entire output. If we could ask that you save that one for the global questions?

**Mr BALDWIN:** Minister, under the heading 3.0, the figures that appear in the budget. I want a reconciliation of the amounts that are as follows: in the 2003-04 budget papers, you estimated an expenditure of \$40.547m, and in the 2004-05 budget papers, you now estimate that expenditure for 2003-04 to be \$50.11m. Can you reconcile for me the \$9.563m difference? I am sure you have it on a sheet. I am happy for it to be tabled or whatever.

**Mr VATSKALIS:** I can provide the information here. The initial Output 3.0 estimate for 2003-04 was \$40.547m, and the final estimate was \$50.1m, an increase of \$9.56m. The key component of this increase is the \$3.1m DCIS notional charges. This is the first year these nominal charges have been recognised in the budget. There was funding for external projects, like the grapevine leaf rust, tuberculosis, red imported fire ant finance about \$600 000; nearly \$1m increased internal revenue from sales like barra fingerlings, cattle, water laboratory; \$3.8m litigation, compensation and legal costs that are funded on an emerging cost basis. The others are small amounts, about \$456 000 increase in direct cost related half year transfer for charges. If you put the money that is in the budget during the year, and take out the money that was actually one-off, you can see the differences.

**Mr BALDWIN:** Yes I know that is how you find the differences. What I am asking for is the detail that will reconcile that amount of \$9.563m.

**Mr VATSKALIS:** I just provided you a number of figures.

**Mr BALDWIN:** Is that all? Is that the whole detail to reconcile?

**Mr VATSKALIS:** \$88 000 relates to the library function transfer from Department of Community Development, Sport and Cultural Affairs; \$43 000 write-off of assets, less approximately \$200 000-odd for overhead adjustments.

**Mr BALDWIN:** And that then reconciles to the \$9.8m. On that then, for the 2004-05 period, you are appropriating the amount of \$43.678m, which is down compared to the 2003-04 period by \$6.432m. Can you do the same, just give me the reconciliation?

**Mr VATSKALIS:** It is actually down \$6m from the budget estimate rather than the initial budget. But I can actually justify that. The key components of the increase are: \$2.6m reduction in estimates of revenue for external projects, that is the grapevine leaf rust, red imported fire ant, tuberculosis and other internal revenue sources; \$3.8m reduction due to one-off litigation and legal costs recognised in 2003-04 but not incorporated in 2004-05, because they are funded on an emerging cost basis; \$177 000 in anticipated revenue for various charges; \$677 000 once-off carried forward of funds into 2003-04, but not included in 2004-05; \$43 000 for asset write-offs. That is approximately \$850 000 altogether in adjustments. Then we have a number of increases: \$180 000 for the marine rangers program; \$100 000 for the introduction of agricultural and veterinary chemical appeals; \$893000 for a

new fund for indigenous economic development programs; \$146 000 for parameter adjustments; \$456 000 for direct charges relating to balance of half year transfer of CSC charges.

**Mr BALDWIN:** That gives the exact reconciliation ...

**Mr VATSKALIS:** Yes, yes.

**Mr BALDWIN:** ... because all I want is it on the record so that I can look at it afterwards.

**Mr VATSKALIS:** Yes, yes.

**Mr BALDWIN:** Just to take you back to your previous answer. You said in your list, \$3.8m for litigation?

**Mr VATSKALIS:** Yes.

**Mr BALDWIN:** Could I just ...

**Mr VATSKALIS:** Yes, \$3.83m. \$3 833 000 for litigation ...

**Mr BALDWIN:** Your book here says ...

**Mr VATSKALIS:** ... at that includes the barra buy-back.

**Mr BALDWIN:** So that is compensation, as well as litigation?

**Mr VATSKALIS:** Yes, it is litigation and compensation.

**Mr BALDWIN:** And compensation.

**Mr VATSKALIS:** It is for legal services.

**Mr BALDWIN:** And legal costs. Why does your book say \$3.1m?

**Mr VATSKALIS:** What page are you referring to?

**Mr BALDWIN:** Page 153, Budget Paper No 3, very bottom line: 'Litigation and compensation expenses required in the 2003-04 of \$3.1m. Output group – Animal, Plant and Fisheries Industry Services.

**Mr VATSKALIS:** Because it does not include the barra buy-back.

**Mr BALDWIN:** Okay, so that is the difference, is it?

**Mr VATSKALIS:** Yes.

**Mr BALDWIN:** \$700 000?

**Mr VATSKALIS:** Well, it is more than \$700 000, but definitely the buy-back.

**Mr BALDWIN:** You have \$3.8m and I have \$3.1m.

**Mr VATSKALIS:** \$3.833m.

**Mr BALDWIN:** Can you give me the details of what makes up the \$3.833m?

**Mr VATSKALIS:** It is \$3.1m for litigation – a one-off litigation - and \$730 000 for the barra buy-back. But that does not mean that we paid \$730 000 for the barra buy-back.

**Mr BALDWIN:** So there is \$3.1m in litigation?

**Mr VATSKALIS:** Yes, relating to BTEC. That started sometime in the 1980s.

**Mr BALDWIN:** Yes, okay. That is all for BTEC?

**Mr VATSKALIS:** Yes.

**Mr BALDWIN:** Okay. I have a number of other ...

**Mr VATSKALIS:** I just need to correct that. Apart from the BTEC there was actually a significant cost for some other agribusiness related litigation like workers compensation and - Phil.

**Mr VIVIAN:** The items included litigation arising from BTEC. It also includes some other agribusiness related litigation which is not BTEC though, and some workers compensation matters, as well as the barra buy-back, and costs associated with those matters, as well as some costs recovered.

**Mr BALDWIN:** As well.

**Mr VATSKALIS:** Yes.

**Mr BALDWIN:** Thanks, Mr Vivian. I have other more general ones. Can do them now, or can I do them in ...

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** If they are off this subject, we will do them later.

**Mr BALDWIN:** They are on money, but ...

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** That particular line, shadow minister ...

**Mr BALDWIN:** I am in your hands, Mr Chairman.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** All right. We will slip down and then we will go back to it. Okay? So if we can focus our attentions on to Output 3.1 – Animal and Plant Industry Production Services.

**Output 3.1 – Animal and Plant Industry Production Services**

**Mr BALDWIN:** Minister, in Budget Paper No 3, page 156, there is an estimated decrease for the capacity to conduct animal health and plant surveillance and diagnostic services. Can you explain that to me? Between 2003-04 and 2004-05.

**Mr VATSKALIS:** The original budget in 2003-04 was \$3.9m, and the revised estimate for 2003-04 was \$5.1m. It is now \$5.056m. The increase from \$3.9m to \$5.1m is because of DCIS notional charges, increasing revenue for lab charges, and a one-off increase for workers compensation payment.

From \$5.1m to \$5.056m is because a decrease of a one-off workers compensation payment, and is

offset by increases in DBIRD general management and DCIS overheads. The decrease is not because we have cut the budget, but because there was a one-off work compensation payment in 2003-04.

**Mr BALDWIN:** I did not say you cut the budget; I just wanted to know ...

**Mr VATSKALIS:** No, no, just make it clear that ...

**Mr BALDWIN:** Can you do that for the next line of the budget paper, which is the capacity to provide and maintain research facilities. This is actually showing an increase on estimated 2003-04 to estimated 2004-05.

**Mr VATSKALIS:** In the 2003-04 original budget it was \$5.03m; in 2003-04 revised estimate incorrectly published \$5.79m - it should be \$5.9m. Okay?

**Mr BALDWIN:** This one here.

**Mr VATSKALIS:** Yes.

**Mr BALDWIN:** \$5.09m?

**Mr VATSKALIS:** \$5.9m.

**Mr BALDWIN:** \$5.90m, okay.

**Mr VATSKALIS:** Instead of \$5.79m, it is \$5.9m. Now we have \$6.3m, and the major variation relates to corporate and internal overheads.

**Mr BALDWIN:** Sorry.

**Mr VATSKALIS:** Corporate and internal overheads.

**Mr BALDWIN:** Are going up in the farm area?

**Mr VATSKALIS:** Mr Vivian can you explain that to you.

**Mr VIVIAN:** In terms of the variation between the 2003-04 original and final budget, there is a \$337 000 increase in relation to DCIS notional charges being brought into these books this year.

**Mr BALDWIN:** That notional DCIS thing, yes.

**Mr VIVIAN:** There is \$50 000 included that relates to some direct charges for IT desktop support and also part of an issue dealing with a worker's compensation payment. There is \$87 000 one-off balances from 2002-03 relating to research farms; \$120 000 revenue increases for research farms, and \$166 000 increases in overheads. In terms of the move from 2003-04 final to 2004-05, there is a \$590 000 increase in overheads, minus \$87 000 reduction due to one-off balances; \$87 000 which relates to the taking on of some library functions this coming year. This is a transfer from the Department of Community Development, Sport and Cultural Affairs. The other issues is the minus \$50 000 for a one-off worker's compensation matter that I referred to in the previous year. It is not going to be in that forward year.

**Mr BALDWIN:** And the additional increases then, what are they posted against?

**Mr VIVIAN:** The main issue there was in relation to a change in the overheads between 2003-04 and

2004.

**Mr BALDWIN:** Which are corporate overheads?

**Mr VIVIAN:** Yes.

**Mr BALDWIN:** What would drive those up by that, minister, through you?

**Mr VIVIAN:** Basically during the course of the year we have been reviewing the way in which we allocate overheads to the various outputs. We are trying to get improvements in the actual costing of the outputs. The principle relationship is in relation to staff numbers within the particular outputs. There have been adjustments that take account of particular costs that do relate more specifically to an output than to others. The adjustment here is picking up on that reassessment during the course of the year and looking into next year.

**Mr BALDWIN:** So there have not necessarily been staff increases but there have been some adjustments from other output areas?

**Mr VIVIAN:** In relation to the overhead charge.

**Mr BALDWIN:** Can you tell me what they, are over to this area?

**Mr VIVIAN:** Okay. There were some reductions in other areas.

**Mr VATSKALIS:** Mr Smith, can provide more information.

**Mr SMITH:** The nett changes of staff were minus three and that was as a consequence of staffing efficiencies at Berrimah Research Farm where we had four employees who elected to take voluntary redundancy; two employees then transferred from Agricultural Development to Berrimah Farm, giving a nett decrease of two, and then operational efficiencies at Katherine Research Farm allowed a staff reduction of one. So the nett reduction was three across Research Farms.

**Mr BALDWIN:** So just to clarify, is that a minus three across Research Farms? Is that right?

**Mr SMITH:** No. It is a minus five plus two. The nett is minus three.

**Mr BALDWIN:** Yes, a nett minus three across Research Farms? I am just trying to keep it to Research Farms.

**Mr SMITH:** Across research farms, that is correct.

**Mr VIVIAN:** Just to get back, there has been a compensating decrease on corporate overheads in relation to the next output. So, there has been basically a shift across those outputs.

**Mr BALDWIN:** Okay. In the last answer, minister, I heard \$50 000, I think it was, for library services coming from the Department of Community Services back into this area. Can you explain what that is about?

**Mr VIVIAN:** I will just pick up on that. During the course of the year there has been an agreement to transfer the library function that was based at Berrimah Farm and run by Community Development back to this department, and with that came some transfer of resources to cover the costs related to that transfer. Part of the effect of that is covered in the adjustments for this year's budget for this current year 2003-04 in respect of the transfer which was only for part of the year. The balance of the transfer comes through to the next year's budget.

**Mr BALDWIN:** Is that happening specifically to your department or across the departments?

**Mr VATSKALIS:** I cannot comment about the other departments. It is happening in our department.

**Mr BALDWIN:** It would have been a Cabinet decision had it been across all the departments, but ...

**Mr VATSKALIS:** Roger, would you ...

**Mr SMITH:** No, it was a negotiation between us and Department of Community Development, but it made sense for us because our libraries are essentially scientifically oriented so we specifically bid to get back the Berrimah and AZRI libraries.

**Mr BALDWIN:** Thanks. So it is a one-off in your area?

**Mr SMITH:** Yes, it is a one-off in our area.

**Mr DUNHAM:** Was that a straight contra, Roger?

**Mr SMITH:** Sorry I missed the question, Mr Chairman.

**Mr DUNHAM:** A straight contra?

**Mr BALDWIN:** In terms of costs?

**Mr DUNHAM:** Or will it cost you more? You have just taken the money that they had and their budget has gone down by that much and yours has gone up?

**Mr SMITH:** Correct, plus we had money within our budget anyway because we used to pay for subscriptions and things, and I think the total for both Primaries and Fisheries is \$300 000.

**Mr VATSKALIS:** That's correct.

**Mr WOOD:** The staff would be happy.

**Mr VATSKALIS:** Yes.

**Mr BALDWIN:** Minister, in the answers you just provided on the funding going in and out, there were some – I think you said - increases in the revenues from the farms, I am talking about. By that, I take it that the research farms, as a group or whatever, retain their earned revenue?

**Mr SMITH:** That is correct.

**Mr BALDWIN:** Is that across the board, all of the revenue?

**Mr SMITH:** Across the research farms, yes.

**Mr BALDWIN:** Yes, okay.

**Mr SMITH:** Yes, all their revenue.

**Mr BALDWIN:** How would you break that up? Is it a grouped amount or is it posted back to each

individual farm?

**Mr SMITH:** It is posted back to each individual farm, but I suspect you will find that there is a bit of trade-off occurs as negotiations occur during the year.

**Mr BALDWIN:** So some are doing all right ...

**Mr SMITH:** It is a single trading account.

**Mr BALDWIN:** ...and subsidise the others.

**Mr SMITH:** It is a single trading account, Mr Chairman, and the farm managers negotiate amongst themselves.

**Mr BALDWIN:** Okay. We have done a bit on the staff. We are nett three down. Could you just give me the staffing levels - and I am happy if you table a sheet - across each of the research farms?

**Mr SMITH:** Okay. For 2004-05, Mr Chairman, Berrimah Research Farms was 8.5; Beatrice Hill Farm – 2.5. These are FTEs. Coastal Plains Horticulture Research Farm – 2.5; Ti Tree, which is also horticulture – 1; Douglas Daly Research Farm – 7.5; Katherine Research Station – 5.5; Victoria River Research Station – 4.5; and Alice Springs Research Farm – 3.5. That is a total of 35.5.

**Mr VATSKALIS:** 38.5.

**Mr SMITH:** No, 38.5 is 2003-04; 2004-05 will be 35.5.

**Mr VATSKALIS:** Yes, 35.5.

**Mr BALDWIN:** Do all of those positions have permanent people in them?

**Mr SMITH:** I cannot tell you how many positions are currently filled, but most of them should be filled because it is the Dry Season, but to answer your question whether they are all permanently filled, many of them we actually use as casual positions because most of the work is in the Dry Season. The farm managers, the assistant farm managers are permanently filled, but in some of the areas, a number of the farm staff we use as seasonal positions.

**Mr BALDWIN:** Do you have a break-up between the permanents and the casuals?

**Mr SMITH:** Not with me, no, I don't.

**Mr BALDWIN:** All right. Trials that have been undertaken that will continue in the 2004-05 period, minister, across those research farms. Do you have a breakdown of what is going on at those farms in terms of trials, particularly in this coming year?

**Mr VATSKALIS:** Yes. At the Coastal Plains Horticulture Research Farm, we have the banana Panama program and quarantine facility, the Australian National Mango Breeding Program, the National Australian Quality Development Program, a collaborative mango productivity research site with CSIRO, tropical exotic fruit program, the cannery bamboo shoot program, and Asian vegetable program.

In Ti Tree, we have horticultural research with citrus, [inaudible], stone fruit, mango and asparagus.

At Victoria River, it is pastoral production research systems, cattle breeds and fire management.



At Katherine Research Station, we have development and extension programs for the Katherine district and VRD: cattle production research projects, irrigation crop production research, the research concentrating on rotational crops, pasture species and seed production program, sesame crop production program, and tropical horticulture crop research program.

At Douglas-Daly we have a research centre for mixed farming, cattle production from intensive improved pasture, farm mixes and research using crops, pasture and cattle; hay production and care quality programs; Irrigated Farming and National Parvovirus Monitoring Program.

In Beatrice Hill, of course, buffalo. Riverine Buffalo Cross-Breeding Program; Tender Buff Market Development Program, the Brunei Supermarket and Export Buffalo Program, Flat (inaudible) Utilisation and Pastoral Development Program, and the National Parvovirus Monitoring Program. In Berrimah Farm, we have Fundamental Horticultural Breeding programs, mango, exotic tree fruits, and set aside an area for small scaling intensive pasture research blocks.

**Mr BALDWIN:** Minister, the cotton trials at Katherine, have they ceased now?

**Mr VATSKALIS:** No, the cotton trials in Katherine have not ceased. They will continue until the trials are finished.

**Mr BALDWIN:** And when is that?

**Mr VATSKALIS:** I believe it is in 2005.

**Mr BALDWIN:** Why wasn't it on your list?

**Mr VATSKALIS:** Because I probably did not read it out, I do not know why.

**Mr BALDWIN:** Was it on your list?

**Mr VATSKALIS:** It actually is on the list, but I did not read it out, because I do not want to get the member for Nelson excited.

**Mr BALDWIN:** Just on those cotton trials, minister, what is going to happen at the end of those cotton trials with all of the accumulated information?

**Mr VATSKALIS:** The information from cotton does not apply only to the Northern Territory. It applies to other places in Australia, and it also applies to other crops. We learn from cotton about irrigation, about land capability, and we can apply this information to other crops.

**Mr BALDWIN:** Has it been a worthwhile trial?

**Mr SMITH:** We certainly got a lot of money from the Cotton CRC which has assisted us with our irrigation. We have centre pivots, which we have used for peanuts.

**Mr BALDWIN:** Minister, I would assume we have employed some people to help with those trials. How many people will not be employed when those cotton trials are finished on that program?

**Mr SMITH:** There are two specific positions which are externally funded, but then we have a number of externally funded research programs anyway, and when the research programs come to a halt, those external contractors either cease or take up work in another research project. In terms of permanent staff, in terms of core staff, most people are involved in other irrigation research and other farm trials. The work continues on peanuts. It continues on other rotation crops, such as hay.

**Mr BALDWIN:** Given that your government has put a ban on any cotton growing future in the Territory, and this might sound like a silly question, but do you intend allocating any other funding to cotton trials?

**Mr VATSKALIS:** No, we have said that we will support the cotton trials until they finish in 2005.

**Mr BALDWIN:** No, when they finish, do you intend to allocate further funding to further ,,

**Mr VATSKALIS:** At this stage, there is no intention to allocate money for further cotton trials.

**Mr BALDWIN:** You won't?

**Mr VATSKALIS:** There is no intention. The cotton trials will finish in 2005, and that is our commitment.

**Mr BALDWIN:** The fact that you have said you are going to ban it for all future, how do you intend to do that?

**Mr VATSKALIS:** At this stage I do not have to ban it, because nobody in the Territory grows cotton commercially, because it has been proven to be not commercially viable. Why should I ban something that nobody is going to grow?

**Mr BALDWIN:** Well, because ...

**Mr VATSKALIS:** Let me finish. The government has a different mechanism of banning a plant. In this case, the cotton that can grow or is trialled now is genetically modified cotton, and the government can actually introduce legislation to ban the production of genetically modified plants in the Territory.

**Mr BALDWIN:** That is my point though. You haven't.

**Mr VATSKALIS:** Well, why should I introduce this into Cabinet that is not going to apply to anybody because nobody grows cotton in the Territory because it is unsuccessful?

**Mr BALDWIN:** If somebody, say, one of the landholders along the Katherine River down Florina Road, wanted to plant any strain of cotton today, can they?

**Mr VATSKALIS:** I suppose they can if they can find the water.

**Mr BALDWIN:** Well they are next to the Katherine River?

**Mr VATSKALIS:** Yes, but they actually have to get a water licence from the government.

**Mr BALDWIN:** Let us say they have one.

**Mr VATSKALIS:** Well, he has to apply to get one.

**Mr BALDWIN:** Can they grow it today?

**Mr VATSKALIS:** He has to apply for one.

**Mr BALDWIN:** Let us say they have a water licence, can they grow it today?

**Mr VATSKALIS:** No, you cannot say let us say he has one. He has to apply to the government to get

a water licence.

**Mr BALDWIN:** Okay, let us say Carbeen Park which has a water licence and a centre pivot irrigator, can he plant cotton crops today?

**Mr VATSKALIS:** He probably can under the current legislation, but ...

**Mr BALDWIN:** So there is no ban?

**Mr VATSKALIS:** No. The reality is the government said no cotton, and the government is going to take the necessary steps to stop the growing of cotton in the Territory. As I said before, nobody has proven that cotton can grow commercially in the Territory, and nobody has come to us saying: 'I want to grow cotton in the Territory', because people know ...

**Mr BALDWIN:** Never ...

**Mr VATSKALIS:** They know they are not going to grow cotton in the Territory and be commercially viable.

**Mr BALDWIN:** It has been grown commercially in the Territory. Okay. In the trials, was part of it to identify any areas in the Northern Territory that is suitable for cotton growing?

**Mr VATSKALIS:** Roger.

**Mr SMITH:** The trials were primarily conducted, as we know, in Katherine, but there was work done in estimating the climatic conditions as to how widely cotton could succeed, but it has never been tried. The trials are all focussed on Katherine.

**Mr BALDWIN:** Has the department identified any suitable areas in the Territory for growing cotton?

**Mr SMITH:** No. We have some ideas as to where it could be grown but, apart from Katherine, we have not trialled it.

**Mr BALDWIN:** Has it been successfully grown in Katherine?

**Mr SMITH:** There are still questions in relation to the commercial viability of the crop, and there is still work that will need to be done in order to demonstrate that it is a commercially viable crop.

**Mr BALDWIN:** All right.

**Mr SMITH:** To answer your question, it would be very foolish for somebody to attempt to grow it commercially without having that information to hand.

**Mr BALDWIN:** Yes, I was thinking of a small patch, if somebody wanted to just go and ...

**A member:** Grow enough for a shirt.

**Mr BALDWIN:** Yes, whatever. The so-called ban is not in place. There is nothing to legally stop anyone growing any strain - whether it is a two gene or otherwise - in the Northern Territory as we sit here.

**Mr VATSKALIS:** I have said before, member for Daly, if somebody wants to grow cotton in his backyard, he can grow cotton in his backyard. However, in commercial quantities, certainly, there is nobody who is going to do it here because there are unanswered questions about the commercial

viability of cotton in the Territory.

**Mr DUNHAM:** It is not banned. It is not banned, is it?

**Mr VATSKALIS:** But why ...

**Mr BALDWIN:** No, it is not banned. I will move on.

**Mr VATSKALIS:** It is like banning fishing in Central Australia.

**Mr BALDWIN:** Minister, you have irrigation trials on at the Douglas Daly Research Farm ...

**Mr VATSKALIS:** Can you repeat your question? I am sorry, member for Daly.

**Mr BALDWIN:** You have irrigation trials going on at the Douglas Daly Research Farm. Is that correct?

**Mr VATSKALIS:** Yes, it is.

**Mr BALDWIN:** Are you concerned about the future of those trials with regard to the water allocation issues that are going on at the moment?

**Mr VATSKALIS:** As you are aware, there is a community reference group down in the Douglas Daly at the moment looking at the whole Douglas Daly situation. The trials continue; they are not extending. People were mainly concerned about the clearing and the development - or unplanned development - in the Douglas Daly. The government has said that nothing else is going to happen until the community reference group puts their recommendation to government. The government has not stopped the trials; the trials continue. We will learn vital lessons from these trials so we can apply them in other places in the Territory.

**Mr BALDWIN:** I know it is not your area, but there are no other water allocations going on, in my understanding, whilst the committee is deliberating?

**Mr VATSKALIS:** Quite right, as you said, it is not my area.

**Mr BALDWIN:** You do not want to answer that?

**Mr VATSKALIS:** What am I going to answer? It is not my area, not my portfolio.

**Mr BALDWIN:** Well, it is your research farm, that is why.

**Mr VATSKALIS:** No, no. The research farm has not closed down; it has not stopped the trials. Water is still utilised. It has not expanded, but water allocation for commercial purposes is not my area.

**Mr BURGESS:** I might be able to help. The focus is on the Daly River. The research farm has irrigation bores in places around the Douglas and, as I understand it, they are not implicated.

**Mr BALDWIN:** Minister, with due respect to your CEO, one of the major concerns of that reference group at this point in time is water allocation. The water allocation has been looked at from a point of view of the Katherine Daly Douglas system, including all of the groundwater. Therefore, it is a major contention at the moment within that committee. Anyway, that is enough on the farms for now and this area from me.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** Any members of the committee wish to raise any questions?

**Mr WOOD:** I will just straighten up my cotton shirt.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** I will stick with my rayon.

**Mr WOOD:** Minister, on page 19 of the business highlights book it says that six areas for commercial horticultural production between Tennant Creek and Aputula had been identified. Can you give some details on where those sites are?

**Mr SMITH:** They are all on Aboriginal land. I do not have the exact locations of them but we can soon provide them to you.

**Mr WOOD:** All right. Yes.

**Mr VATSKALIS:** We are at Ti Tree, and Ali Curung is an area that has been identified as having potential with significant water resources. Pine Hill is another one. We are currently negotiating with the native title holders. There is interest not only from businessmen, but also Aboriginal interests to explore these areas for horticultural development.

**Mr WOOD:** This may be one of the cross-over questions but you mentioned you have been finding water in the areas suitable for horticultural. Are they renewable sources of water?

**Mr VATSKALIS:** My understanding is that the water table in Ti Tree and Ali Curung is renewable, not fossil water.

**Mr WOOD:** And they have recently found another basin of water in Ti Tree, is that correct?

**Mr VATSKALIS:** There is the original water table in Ti Tree and there is another one in Ali Curung. The department has been working closely with DIPE, and they have done a lot of drilling and have found resources of water, some of them very good, some of them not very good, the recharge rates can be different. I am aware of significant quantities of water in Ali Curung.

**Mr WOOD:** Minister, on page 97 of the NT Economy book it states that rural industries in the Territory comprise a number of sectors, including poultry. This claim is also repeated on page 99. Given that Inghams have now gone, where is the poultry industry?

**Mr SMITH:** Mr Chairman, I think at the time that the book was written they were functioning.

**Mr WOOD:** Ah, but this is only recent. Could I follow that up, minister? Considering that the tourism industry got \$90m over the next couple of years, why could not have some money been put into the poultry industry to help it survive?

**Mr VATSKALIS:** Mr Chairman, the development of the poultry industry in the Territory is not an issue for the government to decide. It is a commercial decision to make. Considering the problems we have in the Territory, not only the weather but the distance from places where you can source the feed, and the added cost to raising chickens in the Territory, I think sometimes it is not a wise decision to start a poultry business in the Territory. We should better concentrate on things that we can do best in the Territory, rather than trying to develop things that are more suitable to a southern climate or closer to the food production than up here.

**Mr WOOD:** If I had feathers, minister, my feathers would be starting to rise after that. What you said is exactly the argument I could put to tourism. It is very hot and it is a long way away. If you apply it to one industry why is it not applied to another industry, which was only small, and I think if they had a subsidy on feed for instance, which you do apply for fertilisers, I think, some of those poultry industry could have survived.

**Mr VATSKALIS:** Many tourists come here despite the hot, sticky conditions to have a look at the Territory because it is a unique place. Not many will turn up to a chook farm to have a look at chooks in the Territory, with all due respect. But again, subsidising one sector only - why the poultry industry and not anything else?

**Mr WOOD:** You have subsidised grain industry in years gone by. The fertiliser people used to ...

**Mr VATSKALIS:** Years gone by we did when the industry was in its infancy and if industries cannot survive ...

**Mr WOOD:** ... subsidised weed control.

**Mr VATSKALIS:** We subsidised weed control because it had an effect on the whole land of the Territory.

**Mr WOOD:** There was no subsidy at all for poultry. It was a paltry subsidy if it was!

**Members** interjecting.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** You have had that line for about three weeks! You have been dying to use it.

**Mr WOOD:** Okay, now for something different. The budget papers say that the outlook is strong in all rural sectors, except for cattle production. Why not cattle production?

**Mr VATSKALIS:** There is a reduction in the export of cattle, and that depends on many conditions, especially economic conditions in South East Asia - for example, we do not have a market now in the Philippines. We tried to reinstate it. This wish is expressed by the Filipino government. This morning, I was visited by the Philippines Ambassador who indicated a strong will by the Filipino government to reinstate the live cattle export to the Philippines.

A number of factors have affected the Territory. The number of cattle exported live from the Territory has decreased slightly because, with better conditions in Queensland and other states, we see a lot of cattle actually transported to other states where the cattlemen restock their properties.

It is a very volatile industry, which depends on many factors rather than one factor. Not only have climatic conditions been very good for us in the past few years, but also the economic conditions of our clients.

**Mr WOOD:** Has production gone down rather than exports?

**Mr VATSKALIS:** No, the export that has gone down. Production is doing very well, thank you very much. Live export has gone down.

**Mr WOOD:** Is there a real risk that we will lose the Filipino market if we cannot resolve the import of bananas?

**Mr VATSKALIS:** I quote here the Filipino Ambassador: it was the ex-president Estrada and his minister who retaliated against Australia for the banning of the importation of bananas from the Philippines by banning the importation of live cattle. According to the Filipino government, the retaliation hurt the Philippines more than Australia because many farmers that used Australian cattle in feed lots to fatten and then sell them did not have any good quality cattle and these people suffered more than Australian clients.

**Mr WOOD:** Thanks, minister. There is \$250 000 for a collaborative project with HBB and Meat and Livestock Australia investigating more efficient use of pastoral land. Can you expand on what that project is?

**Mr VATSKALIS:** Roger.

**Mr SMITH:** Yes, Mr Chairman, it arises out of work that our people did at Mt Sanford, where we demonstrated that the ability to increase carrying capacity was quite significant based on better distribution of water and fencing. In fact we pushed the research to 15 times the normal carrying capacity in research trials - granted that those were in good conditions without any collapse of pastures. So by our calculations, Heytesbury are now going to trial that on a larger scale, on a commercial scale. They have been putting some substantial infrastructure investment in and they are looking at effectively doubling the carrying capacity of commercial scale enterprises in the Victoria River District.

**Mr WOOD:** Minister, I have a point of clarification. I know Victoria River Research Station is a research station, and a lovely spot to camp, but how does Mt Sanford fit into research? Is it part of the government's research stations or is it private?

**Mr SMITH:** Mt Sanford is actually part of Victoria River Downs or VRD station, and it was an area that, by agreement with VRD, we were using for trials. So it is 'on-property trials'. We do a lot of that.

**Mr WOOD:** Thank you. Minister, money has been allocated for assessing the suitability of cocoa production in the Territory. This sounds like it is nearly historical. What is this all about?

**Mr VATSKALIS:** Roger.

**Mr SMITH:** If my memory serves me right, the project has been running for about four years. I could be wrong, it could be three, but I think it is about four or five years that the project has been running. Cadbury Schweppes approached Queensland, Northern Territory and Western Australia to do a combined trial on cocoa in northern Australia, and they are looking for an area that is politically stable and that could guarantee the quality of the crop that they are looking for. We have trialled cocoa at Coastal Plains and, in short, we have some problems there, primarily because of the sunlight conditions. It appears that cocoa may well be more effective in north Queensland than it is in the Territory, but we are still looking for varieties. We have not given up yet.

**Mr VATSKALIS:** However, during my food statement in the House, I had one cocoa fruit in the basket and that seems to grow very well, but we have to consider the special sunlight and other conditions in the Territory.

**Mr WOOD:** I thought that was a premature pawpaw when I saw it.

**Mr VATSKALIS:** No, it was a mature cocoa.

**Mr WOOD:** Minister, I know you think I am the great cotton lover of the north, but that is not the fact. I am neither for nor against cotton. What I consider the prime question about any crop grown in the Territory, whether it is cocoa, mushrooms or tomatoes, is the cropping practices that are used for any crop. I do not see cotton as any different from strawberries, tomatoes, peanuts or whatever when it comes to cropping. Minister, will you still allow cotton trials to at least go ahead in the Territory if another company wishes to do it? I am not saying I support broadacre cotton by any means but, surely for the sake of research and knowledge, we must have some opportunity to trial things, like cocoa, like cotton, chilli. Would you allow a cotton trial to continue?

**Mr VATSKALIS:** I stand by government words that no cotton will be grown commercially in the Territory.

**Mr WOOD:** I think the Chief Minister said 'no cotton'.

**Mr VATSKALIS:** Commercially in the Territory.

**Mr WOOD:** No, no. The word commercial did not exist.

**Mr VATSKALIS:** We guaranteed that the current trials would finish. We have not seen any more proponents for a new trial.

**Mr WOOD:** Has Agro Dowell made an application?

**Mr VATSKALIS:** I am not aware of it. Roger?

**Mr WOOD:** I thought I saw an application in the paper.

**Mr SMITH:** I am not aware of it.

**Mr VATSKALIS:** You have probably seen the newsletter: Monsanto is pulling out of a lot of genetically modified crops.

**Mr WOOD:** That is food crops.

**Mr VATSKALIS:** Yes.

**Mr WOOD:** Thank you, minister.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** Are there any more questions in regard to this particular output, 3.1 – Animal and Plant Industry Production Services? Okay, that concludes consideration on this particular output.

**Output 3.2 – Animal and Plant Resource Protection Services**

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** The committee will now consider 3.2 – Animal and Plant Resource Protection Services. Shadow minister?

**Mr BALDWIN:** The Commonwealth's Australian Quarantine Inspection Service comes under this heading. Minister, is that ceased now?

**Mr VATSKALIS:** It has not ceased; it has been transferred back to the Commonwealth. There is an agreement between the Commonwealth and the Territory government for AQIS to resume direct management of the national quarantine and extra functions of the Territory. My understanding is that, in 2003-04, there was an expenditure for AQIS, and there is no 2004-05 provision. From 2004-05, AQIS will be transferred to the Commonwealth government.

**Mr BALDWIN:** So the changeover is at the end of the year?

**Mr SMITH:** Yes, calendar year. During late November.

**Mr BALDWIN:** Of this calendar year?

**Mr VATSKALIS:** Last calendar year.

**Mr SMITH:** December 2003, the transfer occurred.

**Mr BALDWIN:** And how does that seem to be going now that there has been the transfer back? Have



you had a look? Checked it out?

**Mr VATSKALIS:** I might say, there were complaints about AQIS. AQIS from Canberra sent an investigator up here who met a lot of people who had problems. We encouraged people to speak with them and state their problems, and the person took the comments back. I have not heard anything since then. I am very keen to see the outcome of his investigation and his consultation.

**Mr BALDWIN:** So industry had some issues; you have helped facilitate them?

**Mr VATSKALIS:** Industry had issues, and they spoke to us many times. When we found out that the person was coming up, we personally rang some of these people who had problems and advised them that the person was coming up, when and where, and encouraged them to meet with him.

**Mr BALDWIN:** Abattoirs, minister. There was a consultant's report done on the establishment of a multi-species abattoir for the Northern Territory. What is the status of that now? Is there going to be an announcement about an abattoir.

**Mr VATSKALIS:** Unfortunately, member for Daly, the Katherine multi-species abattoir still remains closed. They require a certain number of cattle to go through the abattoir before they recommence production. The pastoralists of the Northern Territory are not prepared to put cattle through the abattoirs, because the prices for live cattle are high, and seem to be going higher. We have the prices - \$160 to \$180 live weight - and they are keen to export live cattle rather than put it in the market. I understand there is a feasibility study taking place for a multi-species abattoir, probably in Tennant Creek, with the opening of the abattoir in Tennant Creek. I was informed about that last month in Alice Springs. I would like to see a multi-species abattoir open up in the Territory, because it is a guarantee, a safety valve for our cattle industry. Again, it is a commercial decision by the owners of the abattoirs to open them, and by the suppliers, the cattlemen, to supply the necessary numbers.

**Mr BALDWIN:** The report that was done - and it was done on behalf of government ...

**Mr VATSKALIS:** And the cattlemen.

**Mr BALDWIN:** Sorry.

**Mr VATSKALIS:** And the Cattlemen's Association.

**Mr BALDWIN:** Yes, well cattlemen, camels ...

**Mr VATSKALIS:** It was actually done through the Cattlemen's Association, but the buffalo and camels they had ...

**Mr BALDWIN:** You are saying it arrived at a position that, if there was not a consistent throughput of cattle, then to gear up for the other species is not a viable ...

**Mr VATSKALIS:** If there was not a consistent throughput per year of cattle, the abattoir could not operate.

**Mr BALDWIN:** If there is an abattoir such as Katherine, or say Meneling at Batchelor, that is getting that throughput, will that revive the potential of the multi-species facility? Will there be some government assistance to the region's cattlemen? The camel people still want it, and the buffalo people still want it.

**Mr VATSKALIS:** I am fully aware of that. In discussions we had with the department of how we can accommodate them, we provide assistance in-kind to provide this abattoir. However, the question is: are the cattlemen prepared to sell cattle for less than what they currently get in the live export.

**Mr BALDWIN:** Well, there is a market, arguably, about older caps, but ...

**Mr VATSKALIS:** Yes.

**Mr BALDWIN:** ... all I am saying is that, if one of these abattoirs does offer a price that then attracts the cattle, what happens about gearing up to the other species? Will you and your department provide some assistance for that?

**Mr VATSKALIS:** The other species are only waiting for an abattoir to open to kill cattle first - a multi-species abattoir. They are prepared, and they have the ability to provide the species - camels or buffalo - to put it through the abattoir. They do not rely upon government support. The problem we have is we do not have enough cattle to go through the abattoir for the abattoir to open.

**Mr BALDWIN:** Yes, but some of them might have to make some changes - for instance, the Meneling abattoir.

**Mr VATSKALIS:** The?

**Mr BALDWIN:** The Meneling abattoirs at Batchelor might have to make ...

**Mr VATSKALIS:** Yes, well ...

**Mr BALDWIN:** Do they just do that? The idea of the report by government was to see how to facilitate a fully multi-species abattoir. What I am trying to ascertain is: if they want to move down that road, and if they can provide the market price that will attract the cattle, is there some support forthcoming from your department?

**Mr SMITH:** We have had three serious inquiries in the past, and each one of those three involved a proposal to government to look at a form of assistance for part of the infrastructure. On each occasion, we were prepared to assist, but they did not go through for various reasons. Most of those reasons are, as the minister said, essentially the lack of the beast load of cattle.

Right now, we are aware that somebody else is looking at the prospects. Without making commitments to them, we have said that, in principle, we would be very happy to assist. We are just waiting for them to come back and advise us of what they are after and that will be considered, but not a specific proportion.

**Mr BALDWIN:** Can you tell me out of those three, whether one of them was Batchelor?

**Mr SMITH:** On one occasion, yes.

**Mr BALDWIN:** Okay.

**Mr SMITH:** One was Batchelor, one was Katherine, one was ...

**Mr VATSKALIS:** There is a movement for the abattoirs. There has been a feasibility study for the Tennant Creek one which belongs to Brunei. The Katherine one is still closed, and there was somebody looking to buy the Batchelor one. We are prepared to help them, but somebody has to actually commit that they are going to buy it, and come to us and ask. But, nobody is going to do that unless cattle go through.

**Mr BALDWIN:** There are some people looking at purchasing Batchelor.

**Mr SMITH:** Without making a specific commitment, what they would be looking at Batchelor is the ability to handle camels ...

**Mr BALDWIN:** Yes, that is right, exactly.

**Mr SMITH:** If they looked at that and came to us with a specific proposal, we would be very happy to consider it.

**Mr BALDWIN:** That is what they wanted to hear, minister, from you, from their questioning.

**Mr VATSKALIS:** We are prepared to help them.

**Mr BALDWIN:** Okay. You have said in documentation that, by December 2002, you would have identified the banana varieties resistant or tolerant to Panama disease. Have you and what are they?

**Mr VATSKALIS:** My understanding is that we have identified four bananas that are resistant to Panama disease. Two of them are seeded varieties, but they are not suitable for consumption. Another two are quite good, but they are not the kind and variety to replace the Cavendish-type of banana that are currently preferred by the consumer. However, the department is looking at more varieties or cross breeding in order to produce a banana that will resist Panama disease and also will be the kind the consumer demands.

**Mr BALDWIN:** So those varieties that could be good for hybrid breeding and getting a banana suitable for consumption, are they resistant or tolerant to Panama?

**Mr VATSKALIS:** Yes, it is. The Coastal Plains banana quarantine station is a purpose built, high security research facility to world standards. We do the research there. The seeded types are from Indonesia with no commercial significance but they are useful because they provide the root stock to cross breed the others. One is a plantain-type, the other is a [inaudible] type but not suitable as a Cavendish replacement. We are continuing to try to find a suitable banana by cross breeding those resistant or tolerant bananas.

**Mr BALDWIN:** Sorry?

**Mr VATSKALIS:** Disease tolerant or resistant or immune.

**Mr BALDWIN:** The ones ...

**Mr VATSKALIS:** I don't think they are immune, but they are resistant. Certainly we can build from resistance to immunity.

**Mr BALDWIN:** Okay. I will leave it there.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** Are there any other questions in regard to ...

**Dr LIM:** Minister, in Alice Springs we continue to suffer the problem of fruit fly and it is a major issue. What initiatives do you have for this coming financial year to address the issue of fruit fly?

**Mr VATSKALIS:** We have two areas where we have fruit fly problems. One is in Alice Springs; the other is Tennant Creek. There was a trial done in Alice Springs that was proven to be successful. However, I have been advised that we cannot commence the program in Alice Springs now because apparently the factory that produces sterile flies cannot produce sufficient numbers for us to have a good program. The other thing is that if we have an outbreak of fruit flies in Alice Springs that threatens the local industry, the department is going to respond.

**Dr LIM:** Well, just responding to an outbreak is definitely inadequate considering you have a very productive grape growing area within flying distance of Alice Springs. The government has to be doing something about it. Three years and you have done nothing.

**Mr SMITH:** Any outbreaks of fruit fly would be controlled in the normal method. We have controlled them before through baiting and trapping, and quarantine provision. So in the absence of a program to eradicate from Alice Springs, those are the techniques we would have to use.

**Dr LIM:** How are you going to prevent it spreading further up the track, or further down the track from Tennant Creek for that matter?

**Mr SMITH:** The species of fruit fly we are talking about is native fruit fly and that is the problem we have. They are coming in from Queensland anyway. They are coming up from New South Wales anyway. It would be a constant program of release of sterile males to keep it eradicated from Alice Springs and Tennant Creek. It would not just be a one-off eradication.

**Dr LIM:** You are not concerned about what can happen to Ti Tree if the flies get to it?

**Mr SMITH:** We have had a couple of outbreaks at Ti Tree in the past and we have eradicated it so we would use the same technique. But the real issue is, is that in order to go down that track eradicating from Alice and Tennant we need a commitment of sterile flies from Camden and we cannot get it. So if we started now and went half way through the program and then they didn't give us a guarantee of supply, we would have a problem.

**Dr LIM:** And there is no way for the Northern Territory to produce its own, and then we would be a source that others can purchase from?

**Mr SMITH:** It is a pretty substantial cost to establish a sterile insect facility but one of the things that we are doing through the Primary Industry Health Committee is to propose the development of a national fruit fly strategy and to look at how we can gear up across Australia, not just for Queensland fruit fly but for Mediterranean and the tropical fruit flies as well. You would need a national response. Currently the facility is New South Wales governed and the priority is for their requirements.

**Dr LIM:** From a local perspective, people are concerned about fruit fly in Alice Springs. We have apricots growing now, citrus, loads of other types fruit growing in Alice Springs and household fruit growers find that their fruit is destroyed by fruit fly. Surely, that is an issue in itself - the second largest town in the Northern Territory.

**Mr VATSKALIS:** I absolutely agree with you but as Mr Smith said, if we cannot get a guaranteed supply of sterile male from the factory, there is not much point in starting a program because it is not going to conclude successfully.

**Dr LIM:** You can deal with the fruit fly in terms of isolated outbreaks, you can treat it. Why can't you just do a continuing treatment program to try to reduce the numbers out there?

**Mr SMITH:** It would be a lot more difficult in Alice Springs where you are dealing with urban backyard growers. At least when you are in Ti Tree, you are only dealing with about a half a dozen commercial growers and, specifically, an eradication program requires good quarantine so people have to get out there and remove all their fallen fruit and they cannot leave accumulations of fallen fruit. It all has to be deep buried, otherwise all you are doing is continuing breeding fruit fly. So without sterile males, it is very difficult to eradicate in a place like Alice Springs because the only alternative then is spraying. Again, in an urban environment, you have some limitations on that.

**Dr LIM:** Minister, going to the other end of the Territory now, Darwin. Was the port closed down at any time in the last 12 months because of AQIS not providing adequate services?

**Mr SMITH:** Not to my knowledge.

**Dr LIM:** Okay, and AQIS has been very cooperative with the Territory government in terms of our exports of produce, including live cattle and all that?

**Mr SMITH:** Part of the agreement in the hand back of AQIS to the Commonwealth included continuing consultation so the AQIS staff are still located at Berrimah Farm. The new Regional AQIS Manager is still at Berrimah Farm. The Director of Resource Protection from the department still has close contacts in AQIS. So no, I am not aware of any significant issues.

**Dr LIM:** Any inspection issues are being implemented without any difficulties? There is sufficient dialogue between the Northern Territory government and AQIS that things are happening without any delay so that our exporters are not being disadvantaged by the extra step that has to be taken now because it is no longer attached to the Northern Territory government?

**Mr SMITH:** I am not aware of any significant issues. You still get the same number of complaints that we used to get when we had it from people who either inadvertently or through carelessness did the wrong thing. So we still get the same number of complaints, but I am not aware of any significant differences.

**Dr LIM:** Thank you.

**Mr DUNHAM:** The spraying, I think, of methyl bromide - but I could be corrected on that - to eradicate or control the Giant African Snail in containers coming over the port, I have been told that the rate of application has been determined by the department and that it is at a much higher rate than in any other port in Australia and has the potential to damage other equipment, for instance electronic equipment. Is there a decision by the department to review this and to lower it to that which applies in other ports?

**Mr SMITH:** No, and the information that you have is not entirely correct. The confusion in the import industry was with the fumigation rates of methyl bromide for timber, as compared to the fumigation rates that are required to kill Giant African Snail. The fumigation rates for Giant African Snail are those that are recommended and have been trialled and have demonstrated to be successful. The reason, of course, they do not use those in other ports is they do not have the same problem with containers coming in from areas such as Indonesia and places where there is a high prevalence of Giant African Snail. Apart from those tropical ports such as Cairns, where they have the same sort of problem, Melbourne, Sydney, Adelaide do not have a need to fumigate for Giant African Snail because the chances of it establishing there are relatively minor.

That is where the argument also occurred in that when we were doing it, we were quite insistent that a lot of ports out of Indonesia and some of the other countries, which were not on the AQIS list, were fumigated because we believed, quite rightly, that Giant African Snail was a problem in those countries. We have now got AQIS to consider revising their list of Giant African Snail countries to ensure that the Territory is protected from Giant African Snail.

**Mr DUNHAM:** I have no problem with protection. The gentlemen who talked to me about it, talked about places with Giant African Snail are still ports of origin for containers going to other southern ports that do not have the same spraying regime and, with the railway, there is a potential for that container to finally find its destination in Darwin. There isn't a spraying regime on those containers that have come from Giant African Snail countries through another port and finally finding themselves in Darwin without having been opened or clearing customs.

**Mr SMITH:** That is an issue that we are following up with AQIS. You are quite right on that.

**Mr DUNHAM:** So, the rate of application of methyl bromide will not reduce?

**Mr SMITH:** We do not believe that it should reduce, until and unless someone can demonstrate that it is effective.

**Mr DUNHAM:** This bloke tells me that it has the potential to ruin circuit boards and other items that he has that are not timber and not animal products, they are electronics products; and the rate of methyl bromide means that his product is totally ruined by that level of application.

**Mr SMITH:** I am sorry, I cannot answer that. I am not aware of it.

**Mr DUNHAM:** Who should I send him to? Is it an AQIS problem?

**Mr SMITH:** It is certainly an AQIS problem, but we would be happy to assist him, if you want to direct him to me, we can assist.

**Mr DUNHAM:** Okay.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** Any other questions in regard to this output?

**Mr WOOD:** Yes. Minister, regarding the control of ammonium nitrate, is there much ammonium nitrate used in the horticultural industry, and is it likely that ammonium nitrate will be removed from the market? What effect would that have on our horticultural industry?

**Mr VATSKALIS:** As you are aware, there are movements in the Commonwealth government to restrict the sale of ammonium nitrate. Also, one of the companies producing ammonium nitrate decided not to produce and distribute it any more but to replace it with something else. However, I have become aware that it is not actually safe; it can still be used for explosives. It is a Heads of Government negotiation, and the Chief Minister's department was handling this issue.

**Mr WOOD:** Oh. A bit late for that now.

**Mr VATSKALIS:** Yes.

**Mr WOOD:** I should have said, and can you tell me what she found out.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** Any more questions? That concludes the committee's considerations of Output 3.2, Animal, Plant and Resource Protection. Before we commence Output 3.3, I think a five minute break might be in hand.

**Mr VATSKALIS:** Before I finish, Mr Chairman, the bond we currently have for the Ranger mine is \$38 847 481.11.

### **Output 3.3 – Fisheries Resource Development and Management Services**

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** As previously stated we concluded consideration of Output 3.2 – Animal and Plant Resource Protection Services. The committee will now consider Output 3.3 – Fisheries Resource Development and Management Services.

**Mr BALDWIN:** Thank you, Mr Chairman. The plan of management for a commercial barramundi fishery since the recent court decision regarding the interpretation of the coastal limit of the fishery seems to be in conflict now between the plan of management and court decision. You have given an undertaking that that situation is going to be rectified as soon as possible. Can you give us an update on what has happened?

**Mr VATSKALIS:** Yes, not this week but next week there will be public advertisements calling for

people to put in submissions because we have 28 days mandatory period to get submissions before we make any changes.

**Mr BALDWIN:** Just to clarify that, I take it from that, that you are going to make changes to the plan of management rather than do some legislative change.

**Mr SELLERS:** The plan we are putting out for the 28 day statutory period is the Spanish Mackerel plan. The barramundi amendments I think the shadow minister, Mr Baldwin, is referring to is to do with the court case and what we have been asked to do, and it is with government for consideration now, is prepare a Cabinet submission on how we move that forward, which is for Cabinet's consideration. The options include a simple amendment of the plan through a series of other options.

**Mr ALDWIN:** Concluding what - legislative change?

**Mr SELLERS:** Legislative change, yes.

**Mr VATSKALIS:** Yes, my apologies.

**Mr BALDWIN:** I take it that what we are going to try to do is get back to the original area prior to the court decision to allow commercial fishermen back to that...

**Mr VATSKALIS:** The intertidal zone.

**Mr BALDWIN:** Yes. And are they currently accessing the areas they have always accessed?

**Mr SELLERS:** Yes, they are operating under a protocol policy that the Marine Enforcement Unit at police have put it in writing for the fishing industry, which allows them to operate to the same degree that they operated prior to that court case while the amendments are considered by government.

**Mr BALDWIN:** So that would stand them in contradiction to that court case, but there is a protocol that you have worked out with the marine enforcement people not to charge them, but it stands in conflict with the law currently?

**Mr SELLERS:** Yes.

**Mr BALDWIN:** So they are sort of - okay.

**Mr VATSKALIS:** There was an indication that the government is going to address the issue and we cannot leave people in limbo. We are aware that the barramundi catch outside the intertidal zone was abysmal, so we had negotiations with the police ...

**Mr BALDWIN:** Yes, with good reason.

**Mr VATSKALIS:** Yes, well there were 45 barramundi instead of what they used to catch, so we have reached now an understanding and an arrangement because the government is going to address the issue for those people to still fish within the limits they were allowed before, so they are not going to be charged.

**Mr BALDWIN:** Yes. What I am saying is that basically at the moment, they are operating outside of the law.

**Mr VATSKALIS:** Well, no, because the government has indicated that it is going to address the issue by changing the legislation. Even if you charge someone now, by the time it reaches the courts in about 18 months' time, the government will have already changed the legislation. There are serious

issues from the Department of Justice, on the advice we received, that - how can I put it? - the decision was not a good one. There could be grounds for appeal. But the government decided instead of appealing and spending more money, it is going to address the issue by legislation.

**Mr BALDWIN:** I agree with you, minister. I do not mind putting it on the record that the decision was an abysmal one.

**Mr VATSKALIS:** Technically, you might say they are operating outside of the law, but the reality is that the government has indicated it is going to legislate to resolve the problem.

**Mr BALDWIN:** Minister, just to finish on that, when would you see that we can have this issue resolved? It has been going on for quite some time.

**Mr VATSKALIS:** As I said, the Cabinet submission is prepared for me to sign and to put to Cabinet, so it is not going to be in the never never; it is going to be in the next few months.

**Mr BALDWIN:** So within the next few months, we will rectify the situation. That is three months. Righto. The 10-year barramundi fishing strategy that has been called for by all stakeholders, including myself, I take it from what you have said in parliament that you are embarking on this now. Can you give us an outline on what that strategy will address?

**Mr VATSKALIS:** Mr Sellers.

**Mr SELLERS:** Sure, minister. We have invited as many of the key stakeholders to an initial workshop. It will be an overnight workshop so we can get away and talk about all the issues that are of concern to different stakeholders in fishery. The outline we are giving them is that we would like them to come to a shared vision of what the fishery should look like in five years' time and then work backwards in how we achieve that.

The first meeting, as I said, will be an overnight meeting. My guess is that will be the first of a couple of meetings to reach that consensus, and then it is just a matter of implementing it. At the same time, Mr Baldwin, with the commercial fishery and recreational, we are making some amendments to the Barramundi Management Plan, and they will be considered by the group at the same time. There is some work happening on the current plan as well as working on the vision.

**Mr BALDWIN:** Okay, and one would suspect that within that vision, there will be some sort of addressing of the current commercial licences and how you would buy those back, and to what limit, over what period and all that sort of thing?

**Mr VATSKALIS:** Yes. The government is considering the different options about the licence buy-backs. We want to address this issue strategically rather than in an *ad hoc* way, so we are looking into it as part of the barramundi strategy.

**Mr BALDWIN:** Do you have any idea, minister, of the number of licences that should be purchased out of that fishery to (1), make sure there is wild catch fish still available, but (2), to ensure the ongoing viability of it over a long period?

**Mr VATSKALIS:** The government does not intend to wipe out the commercial barramundi fishing industry.

**Mr BALDWIN:** I know.

**Mr VATSKALIS:** We are still going to be able to buy barramundi. Not everyone has a boat and likes fishing. We are going to address this strategically and we have to consider a number of options, such as over-fishing, increased effort, how people can make a living out of what they have invested, and it



is economic development, and the amateurs and the tourists. We will be looking over those but, of course, it will be part of the discussion with all the people who participate in the negotiations and discussions for the Barramundi Fishery Management Plan.

**Mr SELLERS:** Minister, if I can just add on to that. Certainly, in the initial discussions with these groups, we have not gone in with any fisheries group number of commercial licences that may or may not be viable, but I know that commercial and other stakeholders are thinking of those numbers and are very likely to have robust debate about those during the development of a strategic plan.

**Mr BALDWIN:** Maybe I was not clear enough. Probably where I was coming from was, does the department, from a scientific point of view, have a target, even if it is plus or minus five, that you want to get to over, say, the next 10 years, if this strategy is covering 10 years, to reduce the current number of licences in that fishery?

**Mr VATSKALIS:** We were going to 24 licences.

**Mr SELLERS:** 25, it will be 24 as of 1 July.

**Mr VATSKALIS:** That is right.

**Mr SELLERS:** To answer Mr Baldwin's question, what the agency, in terms of managing the barramundi fishery does, is set up management arrangements that range from input ones for commercial, through to output like bag controls for recreational to maintain the sustainability, and that is across the whole sector. Do we think the barramundi fishery is at risk at the moment? No. The current indications are that it has a very good spawning biomass. The discussions that we would be entering into would be driven by the stakeholder groups more on resource relocation than the requirement to remove a licence or to input more control at this stage. That situation can change. We came out of a period in the late 1970s where there was a requirement to drastically reduce the number of barramundi licences, something over 100 down to the 20-odd that we have now, and through industry and other mechanisms they have managed to achieve that.

As we speak, there is no indication of a problem with the sustainability for barramundi, and so there is no sustainability-driven initiative to reduce or change the bag limits, but, as all of us are well aware, there is a whole lot of different end points in mind for commercial and recreational fishermen in terms of the reallocation of how they go about taking that resource. I guess they will be the focus of the discussions.

**Mr BALDWIN:** So from a sustainability point of view, you are saying that there is no need to reduce the number of commercial licences?

**Mr SELLERS:** What I am saying is that, for the whole mix, commercial licences, what is taken by fishing tour operators, indigenous, the recreational component, is within sustainability bounds. And unless there is an area that shows some form of sustainability issue, then there is not a requirement. It is not just commercial; it is across the whole of the group that takes the fish there is not a sustainability issue at the moment.

**Mr VATSKALIS:** While overall the barramundi fishing is in good shape, there might be localised areas where it is actually under threat. By under threat, I mean reduction in the number of fish and people get dissatisfied that they cannot catch a fish. A similar thing happened in Western Australia with the snapper, because people, unfortunately, managed to find the area where the fish congregated and spawned, they used GPS data, they all went fishing and within three years they wiped the snapper from that particular area out. That is what we want to avoid in the Territory.

**Mr BALDWIN:** What is the commercial take of barramundi out of the fishery in terms of tonnage?

**Mr SELLERS:** I do not have the figures in front of me, but it is in the vicinity of under 1000 tonnes.

**Mr BALDWIN:** Just under 1000, or around 1000?

**Mr SELLERS:** I could get you the latest stats report, but it is somewhere around there.

**Mr BALDWIN:** What was it when there were a greater number of licences in that fishery? Has it always been around 1000 tonnes?

**Mr SELLERS:** No, I would have to go back and get you the records to be able to answer that question.

**Mr BALDWIN:** You have the Land Access Working Group, don't you?

**Mr VATSKALIS:** No, it is minister Burns.

**Mr BALDWIN:** It is not with you? Do you have an input?

**Mr SELLERS:** I have. I chair the Land Access Working Group.

**Mr VATSKALIS:** We do have input, certainly ...

**Mr BALDWIN:** Oh, you chair it?

**Mr VATSKALIS:** Yes, we chair it.

**Mr BALDWIN:** You chair it?

**Mr VATSKALIS:** No, Richard ...

**Mr DUNHAM:** You chair it with minister Burns?

**Mr VATSKALIS:** Richard chairs it, minister Burns has participation, sorry.

**Mr BALDWIN:** Can I ask ...

**Mr VATSKALIS:** Yes....

**Mr BALDWIN:** I just want an update on what progress has been made to date in terms of access across pastoral properties and indigenous property?

**Mr VATSKALIS:** I will answer that one. We can look to two areas to gain access. One is Point Stuart, and the other one is opposite the Perron Island. With Point Stuart, we have met with some problems with a sacred site. We are working through the Northern Land Council and the Aboriginal people to resolve this issue. Also, we have the access through LaBelle Downs Station and, currently, we are working with the owner of LaBelle Downs Station to gain access through the station to opposite the Perron Islands.

The other area is that we are negotiating with McArthur River Mines in Mule Creek. McArthur River Mines owns the pastoral lease and they are quite happy to let people go through. We are thinking about realigning the road in Mule Creek because the current one does not allow people to launch their boats at tall tides. We have really good negotiation with MRM.

We are going to work with the council to establish a new boat ramp in Rocky Creek. You probably

noticed that at Dinah Beach work is now being undertaken to double the width of the boat ramp, and to extend it. Also, we are going to have negotiations with the Palmerston City Council in order to upgrade the Palmerston City Council boat ramp and provide power. We are looking for a fishing platform at Elizabeth River to provide access for people who do not have a boat.

**Mr BALDWIN:** The Point Stuart one - that is a sacred sites issue has been ongoing for some time. What is the hold-up there?

**Mr VATSKALIS:** Because of the sacred site and the restrictions in the approach of sacred sites. We are actually negotiating a different access, or realigning a particular road and boat ramp in order to gain access to the water. It is sensitive negotiation, and we are talking to the Aboriginal people who live in that area or the traditional owners.

**Mr BALDWIN:** So there are other opportunities to place the access to the water away from the sacred site?

**Mr VATSKALIS:** Yes, yes.

**Mr BALDWIN:** Why would you not just do that then?

**Mr VATSKALIS:** Because it has to be a place where we can actually put the boat ramp. You have to be able to launch a boat during different tides so you are not going to get stuck in the mudflats.

**Mr BALDWIN:** Yes, but that is what I asked: is there another place that is not in that ...

**Mr VATSKALIS:** That is actually what they are investigating at the moment: how to put the boat ramp in another place so it does not impact on the sacred site, or realign the road to another area away from the sacred site, so you gain access to the water.

**Mr BALDWIN:** That has been going on for quite some time, though, hasn't it?

**Mr VATSKALIS:** Yes, it takes time. We understand that, but ...

**Mr BALDWIN:** What? To investigate another site?

**Mr VATSKALIS:** No, to carry out the investigation. The sacred site was actually identified recently. It was not identified a long time ago, and that is what put the spanner in the works.

**Mr BALDWIN:** Yes, but if you leave the sacred site where it is, is there another place?

**Mr VATSKALIS:** That is actually what they are investigating - to find a place where it would be easy for us to realign the road and put the boat ramp.

**Mr BALDWIN:** All right, but it has been going on for months?

**Mr VATSKALIS:** Yes.

**Mr BALDWIN:** My understanding is that guy who is out there is waiting for this to happen before he can open his facilities.

**Mr VATSKALIS:** I sympathise. I spoke to the gentleman there, and I know very well his predicament. We have the same problem. We would like to operate it very quickly, but we have to negotiate with the traditional owners and do the engineering for the new boat ramp.

**Mr BALDWIN:** Negotiating with the traditional owners about impact of the sacred site?

**Mr VATSKALIS:** Yes.

**Mr BALDWIN:** I thought you just said you were going to leave that alone and go somewhere else.

**Mr VATSKALIS:** No, no. We have to find a way to put the boat ramp in such a way that it does not impact upon the sacred site, or re-engineering to put it somewhere to have access to the water. They are the two options we are examining.

**Mr BALDWIN:** Who heads up those negotiations?

**Mr VATSKALIS:** DIPE.

**Mr BALDWIN:** And the LaBelle one? Is that ...

**Mr VATSKALIS:** My understanding of the problem we have there is they cannot get an agreement from the traditional owners to gain access through the Aboriginal land. We have to realign the road, but the technical difficulties there is that the road can remain waterlogged for long periods of time, and we are yet to engineer a solution to gain access over the swamp to reach dry ground. DIPE is working on it.

**Mr BALDWIN:** On the LaBelle side or the ...

**Mr VATSKALIS:** The LaBelle side. They will be over on the LaBelle side.

**Mr BALDWIN:** You are not going on the other side?

**Mr VATSKALIS:** The traditional Aboriginal owners cannot reach agreement among themselves.

**Mr BALDWIN:** You should talk to Mr Wood.

**Mr VATSKALIS:** He might be the problem!

**Mr BALDWIN:** He might be a facilitator for you. So on the LaBelle side, the big swamp, are you saying what you mooted to now is engineering the road, the causeway?

**Mr VATSKALIS:** Currently, DIPE is working on it.

**Mr BALDWIN:** That will be forthcoming? Where will they end up? On the coast on the same place they have always ended up? Because the original agreement with the LaBelle owners prior to the new ones ...

**Mr VATSKALIS:** Mr Townsend.

**Mr BALDWIN:** ... was to let people into Channel Point. Where are they going to end up on the coast, the public access?

**Mr VATSKALIS:** We would like to actually to do it in a place where you can launch boats at all tides. We understand that close to the boundaries, LaBelle and Aboriginal land, these sites are not suitable for launching boats at all tides and so it has to be moved a bit to the side.

**Mr BALDWIN:** Towards Channel Point?

**Mr VATSKALIS:** Yes, but not in Channel Point. Channel Point has its own lease. We can't ...

**Mr BALDWIN:** Yes. It is still north of Channel Point, but closer to ...

**Mr VATSKALIS:** I believe so, but again, DIPE is currently investigating all the solutions, so they will come with the final design. I am not privy to that.

**Mr BALDWIN:** The aquaculture research and development plan, how is that going?

**Mr SELLERS:** Mr Baldwin, the aquaculture research and development is a component of the entire research and development plan that we review each year prior to the Fisheries Research and Development Corporation external funding round. That has been reviewed and is ready for this current round where people put in applications in July. But there is also a separate process which is a review of where we are at with aquaculture in the Territory at the moment, and where we are going to go. That is the Darwin Aquaculture Centre and assistant researchers and things that we do with the university over the next five years and that is a separate review process that has just been finalised at the moment.

We have our standard R&D plan which is annually reviewed and we have a strategic view for where we are going to take our aquaculture centre and the associated research over the next five or so years. It is just coming to completion now.

**Mr VATSKALIS:** We have significant contribution by private industry and the Charles Darwin University about prawns, using local stock rather than imported stock. We have a significant increase from the production of the Tiwi Islands aquaculture facility and the Adelaide River facility. We believe that the industry themselves is now talking to each other in order to facilitate the production of different size of barramundi. The good news is that barramundi from Adelaide River gets exported to the United States and other places and we currently export about two tonnes a week to the United States and other markets.

**Mr BALDWIN:** From where?

**Mr VATSKALIS:** Out of the Adelaide River - they are marketing as Adelaide River barramundi - and from Port Hurd.

**Mr BALDWIN:** That is great. The shark fin issue: the recent claims in the paper that sharks can be brought in here, that there seems to be a lot of fins getting around with no sharks attached to it. What is happening with that? I know it is a policing-type issue. What is going on there?

**Mr VATSKALIS:** We have 19 licences and only 11 of them are active. The police actually police every single Northern Territory licence holder that comes into the port. That is the best way to investigate what is happening. At the same time, we have a number of Westralian Australian boats that come and unload in Darwin which we cannot police because we do not issue the licence. The Western Australian government issues the licences. There have been many claims, but my understanding is that the police are actually investigating all these claims. The police are inspecting all our boats. Richard, is there anything else that you want to add?

**Mr SELLERS:** The member for Daly might like to know we are trying to encourage the Western Australians to come up with similar regulatory arrangements so that the boats that come from WA have to make best use of all the product that they catch. Those negotiations are going reasonably well. They could do it as simply as by putting a condition on their license and I guess we will find out about that in the next month or so.

**Mr BALDWIN:** Can they fish in our waters under their licences?

**Mr SELLERS:** No, under their licence, they are restricted to outside the NT waters.

**Mr DUNHAM:** Steam into our port and claim they caught them across the boundary. That is what they are doing.

**Mr SELLERS:** Yes, it is the closest port for where they are working. It is not unusual. We have quite a few of the demersal fleet that also use Darwin because it is also easier to unload and get the product out.

**Mr BALDWIN:** All right, I will leave it there.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** Committee members?

**Mr WOOD:** I might continue on that subject. Minister, I do have some questions about the shark fishery. Given the growth in the shark fin fishing in Territory waters, what is the government going to do to determine the state of the shark fishery? Is it being over-fished? Do you know the status of the shark fishery at the moment?

**Mr VATSKALIS:** Richard.

**Mr SELLERS:** Thanks for that. We have a project where we have a Professional Level 1 researcher working with some external money to investigate some specific sharks and also doing some ongoing monitoring of our actual shark fishing vessels. We have just under one FTE divided between our management staff and our current research staff to look at the shark as well. The work that we have done to date has basically revolved around some observer visits on the boats while they are fishing and the catch data that they have to statutorily provide us for the product that they take.

The question was, though, how do we think shark fishery is going? The shark fishery itself has an export component and it has to go through an external environmental review by the Department of Environment and Heritage of the Commonwealth now to receive export accreditation. We have to complete that process by December this year or they cannot export at all. So we have put patrols in place that we think will maintain the species. We will have that external accreditation considered and finalised prior to Christmas. There will no doubt be some recommendations that come out of that we will then move to implement.

Given our record of getting full export accreditation for every fishery we have taken to them, I have some satisfaction in saying that we have done pretty well so far. On shark, we are in those negotiations now with the Commonwealth. They are a completely independent auditor for us and we will work with them and implement what ever recommendations come out of that.

**Mr WOOD:** Minister, is it not the case that you are required to bring a percentage of trunk weight on board back to shore and that ratio is fresh or frozen fin, for instance, weight to be no more than 8% of trunk weight on board a vessel and there are three other requirements for a licence? Now, if all the fishing boats, the 11 of them, were to do exactly that, we would have shark coming out of our ears, I would imagine, when they came back to shore. One boat, I am told, can bring in 10 tonne of shark and that is all MOECO can handle. MOECO make the fish fertiliser. What happens to the rest of the fish? The excess fish?

**Mr SELLERS:** Sorry, Gerry, are you asking us a marketing question?

**Mr WOOD:** I am asking whether if fishers are fishing according to the licence that they are required to now, where they must bring a percentage of the trunk back to shore and, if I do some calculations, one of those boats, as far as I know, can supply 10 tonne of body to the fertiliser people, MOECO, which can only handle 10 tonne - it is all their vat, I think, will handle - what happens to the rest of the bodies?

**Mr SELLERS:** We have already heard the minister indicate that the Police Marine Enforcement Unit is looking at these vessels and making sure that they stick to the requirements, so that is something that we are being told is being enforced and compliance is taking place. Your question goes beyond that in saying are there other markets than the fertiliser plant. I understand there are. Do I have the details of them in front of me? No.

**Mr WOOD:** I suppose what I was getting out is that we have made some conditions, and part of the reason that fisheries made those conditions is because they are trying to get us to fit within the national plan of action for sharks, that type of agreement, which talks about minimise unutilised incidental catches of sharks and minimise waste and discard from shark catches in accordance with the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries. I am probably trying to find out, if the government has said this is a requirement, and notwithstanding you said there are possibly some other markets, but if there is only one place that can take only a percentage of that catch, from a fishing point of view, so what a waste of time to bring all this fish into town, if I know I cannot get rid of it, is there a role for the government, if it makes these conditions, to put in some form of plant which will enable that catch to be utilised?

**Mr SELLERS:** Yes. Perhaps I do not understand your question. Let me take you through the steps I think I am hearing. The police are checking the compliance and the condition and they are telling us that it has been complied to. I understand there is a fertiliser plant that takes a limited amount that is taking some. Crabbers and others are taking some product. And then I hear, and this is where I guess it is addressing the question, is there a role for the seafood industry and government to help find other markets or to help utilise product?

**Mr WOOD:** Perhaps it would help to put a bigger fertiliser plant in so that you can use this.

**Mr SELLERS:** So the answer to, is there a marketing role within industry and within government, the answer is yes. We have a person seconded to the Seafood Council of Health, through seafood handling and some marketing issues. Is it going to specifically be a fertiliser plant for shark, I cannot answer that for you, Gerry. We would need industry to say that this is an area we would like to expand on, and they, the shark industry, have not done that. Given your calculations they may well be, but to date they have not.

**Mr WOOD:** I suppose the concerns put in from the community are that we are taking the fairly lucrative part of the shark, which is fin. We cannot eat the shark, especially over a certain size, because it is full of ammonia and mercury, I presume. People see it as if we are taking the rich bit off the fish to sell, I suppose, to fairly exclusive markets, and we are throwing away a huge piece of meat. I just would have felt that ...

**Mr SELLERS:** The issue there is the same with throwing away a large part of the meat, we have not seen that. We are saying that compliance is being achieved, where we have not seen a shark dumped. We have not seen or had reports of it being dumped. The other thing you might like to think about is that the fins are valuable, yes, of all sizes of sharks are valuable, and some of the bigger ones are very valuable. Shark liver, shark cartilage, shark flesh, shark skin, shark teeth, are all marketable items as well. My understanding is that the boats that are taking a percentage of large sharks are bringing in the teeth, bringing in the cartilage and all these things have their own market space. The fact that some of the trunks go to a low value market, like fertiliser, is unfortunate. I would encourage them to find better markets.

**Mr WOOD:** What I am getting at is that there is certainly an issue out there, otherwise the government would not have put these conditions on the licence. What I would like to see, if these conditions are on the licence, one is that we do know they are being policed, and I do not want a futile policing of this, because if there is no market for the body of the shark, what is the point. But if the government has put these licence conditions on, then I think you would have to also be proactive in making sure the rest of the shark is utilised, otherwise it would appear to be a cynical exercise.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** That is the answer we have for you, Gerry.

**Mr WOOD:** One other question there, minister. The budget says the government will pursue the creation of a trepang hatchery; Regional Highlights, page 11. What is the current status for trepang harvesting licence, and how many and who has them? I believe a couple of years ago there was one Victorian operator and no Aboriginal community has yet been offered one.

**Mr SELLERS:** I will deal with the trepang hatchery first. We are in negotiations with a private company which wants to operate on our site at the Darwin Aquaculture Centre to do some trials with a trepang hatchery. There are another three separate parties which are investigating trepang aquaculture in confidential negotiations with us at various sites around the Territory. That is the trepang aquaculture. The status of the six licences is that they are still only owned by the one individual, and that has not changed since the last report.

**Mr VATSKALIS:** Also, they are looking not only at trepang but also at the development of other aquaculture like sponges. That has the ability to provide an economic incentive to Aboriginal and indigenous communities.

**Mr WOOD:** Thank you, Mr Chairman.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** Are there any more questions for that particular Output 3.3, Fisheries Resource Development and Management Services? That being the case, the committee has now considered Output 3.3. That concludes consideration of this Output Group. Are there any other non-output specific budget related questions?

#### **Non-Output Specific Questions**

**Mr BALDWIN:** Do not pack up, minister. I have to go back. This is non-output specific. Staffing between 2003-04 and 2004-05 budget books has gone down slightly by about 25. Can you just provide a detail of where the numbers have reduced?

**Mr BURGESS:** I can probably answer that. That reduction is associated with the transfer of the staff back to AQIS. It is entirely associated with that there have been other ups and downs in other areas throughout the year, but ...

**Mr BALDWIN:** The bulk of that 25 is ...

**Mr BURGESS:** All of it.

**Mr BALDWIN:** All of it. Right. Minister, previously in budget papers, government has announced \$5m for horticultural packing facilities.

**Mr VATSKALIS:** How much?

**Mr BALDWIN:** \$5m.

**Mr VATSKALIS:** No, \$2m was actually an election promise for the horticultural packing facility.

**Mr BALDWIN:** Okay, I have allowed for inflation. I am testing you, minister. Okay, what is the status of it?

**Mr VATSKALIS:** In relation to the horticultural facility, we had discussions with the industry. The industry has told us they do not need another packaging facility or another facility. However ...

**Mr BALDWIN:** What, anywhere?



**Mr VATSKALIS:** They did not want one especially here in the Darwin area ...

**Mr WOOD:** One in Katherine?

**Mr VATSKALIS:** However, we now have the Horticultural Advisory Group. One of the tasks they have is a partnership group to come back to government and advise where they want infrastructure and what kind of infrastructure, so we can spend money from this amount of money.

In Katherine, there are a number of commercial packaging facilities. However, we had an approach from the NTAGA which asked the government to provide funds for upgrading the existing cold room packing facilities. The government was very happy to do so under the condition that they are not going to compete on commercial terms with other facilities, and the facility will be available to everybody in the district - horticultural or agricultural. The money has been provided to the NTAGA. I wrote to them the other day and advised them that I was happy to help them out.

**Mr BALDWIN:** What sort of money?

**Mr VATSKALIS:** We asked them to provide us with a budget for the upgrade - the detailed works - which they did. I believe they asked for about \$38 000.

**Mr BALDWIN:** That is all?

**Mr VATSKALIS:** Yes, but that was part of the broader ask for maintaining the grounds of the NTAGA, which is a government owned block, and the silos and everything else.

**Mr BALDWIN:** Right. The sectorial plans for each of the primary industry and fisheries areas - have all those been completed?

**Mr SELLERS:** I can speak on the fisheries ones. We are working in conjunction with the Seafood Council. The first three of their sectorial plans are due for completion, and are in final draft. They are for a July presentation. Then we have the barramundi one that we are working on, separate to that.

**Mr BURGESS:** There are a number of strategic plans that are still being worked on in the horticulture section. That is to do with mangoes, citrus and Asian vegetables. In all of those areas, there has been ongoing work. There are some draft plans in place, but they have not yet been finalised. However, we expect those to be finalised ...

**Mr BALDWIN:** That is the sectorial plan - strategic as against the sectorial?

**Mr BURGESS:** For the NT mango industry.

**Mr BALDWIN:** My understanding is that there are some strategic plans and then there are some sectorial plans. Are they one and the same thing or are they different?

**Mr SELLERS:** For some there is just the terminology shift in there. Certainly, we are working with the fishing sector to produce three plans there. The fishing sector is calling them their strategic plans. They are the ones that they are going to complete in July. The one we are working on with the barramundi fishery is a 5 year outlook but in fact it is a sectorial plan for the barramundi fishery and without Rod Smith here to comment on those I could not tell you exactly what the terminology difference is in the three that Mr Burgess just talked about.

**Mr BALDWIN:** They, by the way, minister, for your information, were supposed to be completed by December 2003 according to the Chief Minister. You have said in your *Building a Better Territory* document that you will encourage more intensive development of land in the Katherine/Daly

basin for cattle production. Have you done that?

**Mr VATSKALIS:** It was part of the Douglas Daly area, but they were looking for their subdivisions and certainly development of improved pastures. As you aware we have appointed the reference group now. We are awaiting the results and the outcomes and the community's reference group before we proceed with any further development with Douglas Daly region.

**Mr BALDWIN:** So, encouraging more intensive development of land has not occurred. You mentioned the subdivision of Douglas Station.

**Mr VATSKALIS:** The Douglas Daly region.

**Mr BALDWIN:** Yes, but the land that was going to be subdivided was Douglas Station.

**Mr VATSKALIS:** As I said before, we have to wait for the recommendation of the reference group before we proceed with any further subdivision.

**Mr BALDWIN:** So there is nothing happening on the subdivision of Douglas Station at this point in time?

**Mr VATSKALIS:** No, there is no subdivision until the recommendation from the reference group to comes to government for consideration.

**Mr BALDWIN:** So the private owners of Douglas have been told to wait before any subdivision?

**Mr VATSKALIS:** Further subdivision. The ones who already have property there, they are there. Further subdivisions and clearings are not going to take place.

**Mr BALDWIN:** Well, that is hardly encouraging more intensive development is it?

**Mr VATSKALIS:** It is June and we are expecting recommendations to come to us by October/November. In order to get it right, I think people would benefit more if we get it right, rather than stuffing it up like they did down south.

**Mr BALDWIN:** Yes, but Douglas Station could be non-irrigated farming, I would imagine. What am I asking is have you put the brake on the owners of Douglas Station for subdivision? Because at one point you were facilitating it, now ... .

**Mr VATSKALIS:** The whole Daly region is currently under consideration by a reference group. And we said from the beginning when we called for a reference group, and they were called from all sectors, we said there are not going to be any further subdivisions in the area, and development.

**Mr BALDWIN:** Did you? Or did you say that there was not going to be any other land clearing?

**Mr VATSKALIS:** We said there will not be any further subdivisions and land clearing.

**Mr BALDWIN:** Interesting. Righto. Thank you. The pastoral enterprises on indigenous land: can you just tell me which areas of land you will be focussing on in 2004-05?

**Mr VATSKALIS:** We have allocated funds in this budget in order to increase indigenous participation in pastoral enterprises. Progress includes contracts currently being negotiated on three separate indigenous properties - Amanbidji, Elsey and Kybrook - for the leasing of land to outside investment in addition to indigenous pastoral enterprises. The area being leased is capable of running approximately a combined total of 20 000 head of cattle. While two other areas, Hooker Creek and

Haasts Bluff, have been considered for leasing arrangements and self development operations. They are currently pursued on four separate areas: Hodgson Downs, Seven Emus, Amanbidji and Elsey.

The process of instigating development on country includes corporate governance training, a view of available options, and strategic planning based on the wishes of the community. Because of the quality of the infrastructure on pastoral enterprises that are now indigenous owned, and combined with the fact the majority of indigenous community left the pastoral industry over 30 years ago, a lot of expertise has to be imported to ensure success. This is recognised and accepted by the community themselves. Our intention is to bring people back to country, especially indigenous people, giving the opportunity to return their pastoral properties into production either by themselves or with the assistance from outside with people who have expertise. We have people working with them, as you know. Mr Trier is working very closely with them, and from what I have heard and been advised, his efforts are resulting in success and I am very pleased to say that.

**Mr BALDWIN:** I agree with you minister. That is good, but I think you have another 475 in your budget to expand that area.

**Mr VATSKALIS:** Yes.

**Mr BALDWIN:** Does that mean you are going to put on another officer?

**Mr VATSKALIS:** Two further officers will be employed this year to provide advice in business administration, property budgeting, planning and long-term development.

**Mr BALDWIN:** Where will they be located?

**Mr VATSKALIS:** Where they are needed most. Mr Trier is working with us to identify the areas where they are needed most.

**Mr BALDWIN:** Mr Trier is actually based in Katherine. I am trying to ascertain whether we are going to get some more people live in Katherine or whether there will be one down south and one in the north.

**Mr VATSKALIS:** Mr Trier is currently working with Elsey and some of the other areas. I think it is only natural that these people are going to be located close to the properties they are going to look after. If it is Katherine, it is Katherine; if it is Mataranka, it might be Mataranka.

**Mr BALDWIN:** So these will be new employees that you will advertise for and they could live in Darwin or Katherine or wherever?

**Mr VATSKALIS:** Yes.

**Mr BALDWIN:** Okay. I will pull up there in this output. Gerry will not be long because we only have an hour to go.

**Mr VATSKALIS:** An employment officer will also be sponsored by the industry and will be jointly funded by the government. We are trying to support current apprenticeships for Aboriginal people to get knowledge of running a property.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** I remind committee members that we still have one output to go on Community Engagement and this consideration of the output will be finished at 6.15pm.

**Mr WOOD:** Minister, I do not think you mentioned this before, but under Key Variations was litigation and compensation expenses required in 2003-04 of \$3.1m?

**Mr BALDWIN:** I went right through it.

**Mr WOOD:** What?

**Mr BALDWIN:** I went right through it.

**Mr WOOD:** Did you?

**Mr BALDWIN:** It is all detailed.

**Mr WOOD:** Okay, thanks.

**Mr BALDWIN:** It is actually \$3.877m. It is wrong. The book is wrong.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** Any more questions? That being the case, that concludes consideration of the output. On behalf of the committee, I would like to thank officers for attending. I would also like to pass on my thanks to the officers from DBIRD.

#### **OUTPUT GROUP 5 – Community Engagement**

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** The committee will now consider Output Group 5, Community Engagement. We are ready to go, shadow minister.

**Dr LIM:** My apologies, Mr Chairman.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** That is okay. Shadow minister, do you have any questions?

**Mr VATSKALIS:** Before we start I would, Mr Chairman, allow me to introduce my colleagues. To my left is Alix Goodwin, Director of Community Engagement, Department of the Chief Minister, and Janicean Price, the Director of Ethnic Affairs. To my right is Andrew Kirkman, Chief Financial Officer, Department of the Chief Minister.

I would like to clarify a statement I made in parliament on 15 June 2004. In my statement on Ethnic Affairs, I mentioned that the Ethnic Affairs Sponsorship Program budget was \$1 197 000. I am pleased to advise the House that the level of funding available for grants and sponsorships in 2004-05 is \$1 220 000, comprising \$720 000 for the Ethnic Affairs Sponsorship Program and \$500 000 for the three years Ethnic Community Facility Development Program. The \$720 000 available for the Ethnic Affairs Sponsorship Program includes indexation of \$15 000 and a dissipated revenue of \$5000 from the Australian government for Community Harmony Day.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** We will now move to consider Output Group 5, Community Engagement, Output 5.3, Multicultural Advancement.

#### **Output 5.3 - Multicultural Advancement**

**Dr LIM:** Thank you, minister, for restating those figures. While it is on record in *Hansard*, I wonder if you would happy to table the document you just read those figures from? It makes it easier for me to follow at this moment.

**Mr VATSKALIS:** It is part of my notes. I do not think I want to table it.

**Dr LIM:** Okay. If that is the case then, minister, I refer you to pages 35 and 41 of Budget Paper No 3, and I draw your attention to the allegation of \$2.326m for Multicultural Advancement. If you are not able to table what you have there because they are notes, would you provide me with a breakdown of the allocation into each specific program - Personnel, Operations, and in particular, the Ethnic Affairs Sponsorship Program for 2004-05?

**Mr VATSKALIS:** Certainly. Employee expenses \$342 000; operational expenses \$432 000; grants and subsidies ...

**Dr LIM:** Minister, may I ask you stop for a second. Again, Mr Chairman, the minister is going to read a whole lot of figures from a list, which I am sure I can get out of *Hansard*, but it would save time and a lot of to-ing and fro-ing if we can just get the list tabled. We can then follow that a lot easier.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** I accept your point, shadow minister, however it is up to the minister how he presents the information and how he answers the question.

**Dr LIM:** I appreciate that too, but I am just offering the minister an easier way around.

**Mr VATSKALIS:** I am happy to read them. Grants and subsidies \$1.27m; community engagement overheads \$172 000; departmental overheads \$162 000; revenue \$70 000, and that brings the total to \$2.326m.

**Dr LIM:** In terms of the revenue, can you please explain where the revenue is coming from?

**Mr VATSKALIS:** The revenue, member for Greateorex, is coming from the Interpreter Translator Service.

**Dr LIM:** How many interpreter services have you provided in the last 12 months, and to what language groups and for what purposes?

**Mr VATSKALIS:** I can provide this information. I will do you a favour. I will table this document for the simple reason ...

**Members:** Good on you, well done.

**Mr VATSKALIS:** Of course, I can actually read them to you if you like. We will provide information about on-site interpreting and translation and will provide information about the top ten languages and certainly, interpreting translation for each language.

**Dr LIM:** Minister, what are the full-time, part-time, casual and contract staff numbers for the Office of Ethnic Affairs for the last pay period of this year? How do these numbers relate to 2002-03? If you could provide me with those figures now, I can proceed with other questions.

**Ms GOODWIN:** Can you repeat the question for Janicean?

**Dr LIM:** What are the full-time, part-time, casual and contract staff numbers for the Office of Ethnic Affairs for the last pay period of this year, or the most recent pay period of this year? How do these numbers relate to those of 2002-03?

**Ms PRICE:** There are six staff and they were the same as last year.

**Dr LIM:** All full-time?

**Ms PRICE:** All full-time. That excludes the people who are contracted as interpreters and translators.

**Dr LIM:** Okay. These are the ones that have been provided on the list just a short while ago?

**Mr VATSKALIS:** Yes.

**Dr LIM:** Are there any anticipated changes in staffing levels for 2003-04?

**Mr VATSKALIS:** I am not aware of any.

**Ms GOODWIN:** I will respond to that question. The office will have five staffing positions in 2004-05. There will be an additional one position transferred from Ethnic Affairs into a Business Support Unit, but leaving the overall capacity of Ethnic Affairs at the same level as 2003-04.

**Dr LIM:** Minister, what is the purpose of the person in the Business Support Unit in terms of community engagement?

**Ms GOODWIN:** I will respond again to that. That person will be moving into an area that has responsibility for grants and awards administration. It is a direct transfer.

**Dr LIM:** Minister, are any of the staff from the Office of Ethnic Affairs working on secondment to your office in Parliament House?

**Mr VATSKALIS:** Not that I am aware of.

**Mr DUNHAM:** Not that you are aware of! Oh, you are not sure if you have them up there? God!

**Mr VATSKALIS:** I should be the first to know about it.

**Dr LIM:** I note that the estimated spend for sponsorships and capital grants for this financial year ending shortly is about \$0.7m. Detail those receiving assistance, including how much they each received and how the grants were acquitted.

**Mr VATSKALIS:** The acquittal of grants is a requirement for people to receive grants in the future. There have been cases where people have not acquitted previous grants and have not received grants. The expense is about \$700 000. We can provide a list of the people, amount requested, amount approved, and amount paid.

**Dr LIM:** Minister, you have weekly advertisements in the *Centralian Advocate*, the *Alice Springs News* and, more frequently, in the *NT News* featuring yourself. Who paid for these advertisements, at what cost, and for what purpose?

**Mr VATSKALIS:** The advertisements going into the newspapers are related to the activities of the department, mainly to advise people, for example, calling for the grants, or calling for activities undertaken by the department for multicultural purposes or for the ethnic communities. This is a government advertisement that has my photograph. The advertisements going to the newspaper are to congratulate different communities on their national days, and are paid by ministerial allowance under the Chief Minister's department.

**Dr LIM:** I draw your attention to one of the ads. For example, the full-page ad that you had for the Glenti. I have an A4 copy of that ad that I am happy to table. The ad comes from the Northern Territory government, and features your and the Chief Minister. I am not certain about the purpose of that ad, apart from the fact that it appears to be self-promotion. Would it not be better that you paid this money to the Glenti organisers for them to spend as they see fit and actually be able to perform the function a lot better, than for you to just spend this money on the ad itself? I wonder what it cost, by the way.

**Mr VATSKALIS:** I believe that advertisement actually congratulates the Greek community for their great contribution to the Territory. It recognises the contribution of the Greek community to the Territory. It is a great advertisement and is very small recognition by the NT government of the

contribution of a particular ethnic group to Territorian advancement.

The Northern Territory government has also assisted - as a matter of fact the magazine is not produced by the Glenti committee or the Greek community. It is produced by an individual company. So, the money did not go to the ethnic community. The money paid by the government went to a private entrepreneur. The money paid by the opposition went to the independent entrepreneur; it did not go into the pockets of the Greek community. The Territory government supported the Greek Glenti by \$50 000. The same way it contributes to other ethnic communities like India at Mindil, or Chung Wah celebrations, or the Filipino community celebrations.

**Dr LIM:** By all means I believe that the Northern Territory government and every member of parliament should support all our ethnic communities without hesitation, and contribute as much funds as they possibly can. This, I assume, is an advertisement in the *Sunday Territorian*, so the *Northern Territory News* would be the beneficiary of that. Would it not be better that the Glenti receive that same funding that you would have spent here and you would have done a lot more with that money?

**Mr VATSKALIS:** As I said to you before, the advertisement placed in the Glenti magazine did not go to the Greek community. I noticed that the Territory government and the Territory opposition had advertisements in this magazine, and the money went to a private entrepreneur. This advertisement recognises the contribution of ethnic community and I think it was quite appropriate to go into the newspaper. Quite a few people commented to me that it was great to see somebody recognise the contribution of the Greek community. I said to you before, the Greek community receives assistance from the government and will continue to receive assistance from the government like any other community in the Territory.

**Dr LIM:** Minister, I was not talking about the booklet produced for the Glenti. The booklet advertises the program for the Glenti. It is provided by the Glenti for people attending the event. This is not such a publication. This is a full page advertisement in the *Northern Territory News* or the *Sunday Territorian*. You still not have responded to what it cost. I am saying to you that, that money would be better spent by the Glenti than by yourself.

**Mr VATSKALIS:** Glenti is produced by the Greek Orthodox Community of Northern Australia. The Glenti magazine is not produced by the Greek Orthodox Community of Northern Australia. It is produced by an individual. The money that people pay for advertisements in the Glenti magazine does not go to the Greek community. It goes to the particular individual. I do not have the exact figure for that particular advertisement. I am telling you that particular advertisement cost less than a page advertisement in the Glenti magazine.

**Dr LIM:** What is the price of this?

**Mr VATSKALIS:** I am not aware of that. I could provide you with price later.

**Dr LIM:** You can provide us with price. Should I take it on notice?

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** If you so desire, shadow minister.

**Dr LIM:** Yes, thank you.

**Mr VATSKALIS:** And, member for Grotorex, this advertisement did not come from the Office of Ethnic Affairs, it came from the Department of the Chief Minister, which is not even in my area.

**Mr DUNHAM:** Why is your photo on it?

**Mr VATSKALIS:** It is a ministerial office expense, member for Grotorex, and it actually comes under the Chief Minister.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** Minister, I take it then you will not be taking the question?

**Mr VATSKALIS:** No, the question should be addressed to the Chief Minister not to me.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** All right, please continue.

**Dr LIM:** I will continue, Mr Chairman. This ad is signed by Kon Vatskalis, MLA, Minister for Ethnic Affairs and it has your signature on it. Now, to say then that you have no responsibility for it is beyond belief. Either you are responsible for it, and therefore you signed it, or you are not responsible for it and you signed a blank cheque, and you let somebody else take the responsibility. What have you done?

**Mr VATSKALIS:** Member for Greateorex, this is paid by my ministerial office. The expenses of the ministerial office are the responsibility of the Department of the Chief Minister. The questions should be addressed to the Chief Minister.

**Dr LIM:** You authorised an expenditure. You obviously did; you signed for it. Now, what did it cost? If you do not know, then you should find out, and then we would both know.

**Mr VATSKALIS:** Once again, I am telling you, the ministerial expenses are under the Department of Chief Minister. I put this advertisement, I signed it, but this expense comes from ministerial office expenses that are controlled by the Department of Chief Minister. It is simple.

**Dr LIM:** So you don't know? Are you prepared to find out and let me know?

**Mr VATSKALIS:** In due course I will find out and let you know.

**Dr LIM:** You will. Will you take that on notice?

**Mr VATSKALIS:** No, I am not taking it on notice. I said in due course I will find out and let you know. I will personally make sure that you know about it.

**Dr LIM:** Well, that puts the question on notice.

**Mr VATSKALIS:** No. It is not my responsibility; it is not my department.

**Dr LIM:** Here is a signed document by you, and this is a photocopy obviously, but I assume that is your signature and that is your name underneath that.

**Mr VATSKALIS:** It is my signature and my name. However, it is not my expenditure.

**Dr LIM:** So you are responsible for it.

**Mr VATSKALIS:** It is ministerial expenditure under the Department of the Chief Minister.

**Dr LIM:** Okay. With regards to support for ethnic communities in Alice Springs, what global sum of money is being spent in Central Australia as opposed to the Top End?

**Mr VATSKALIS:** You have to consider also the population of Alice Springs and the population of the Top End. We have provided for a number of projects in Alice Springs. High schools apply for grants, the multicultural community applies for grants. We are prepared to provide you a list if required and give you a break down of what we have done in Alice Springs with schools.



Anzac Hill High School, planting of trees, there you see \$550. If I go down the list you will find a number in Central Australia, like the Muslim Islamic community down there. We will provide you with a list of those organisations.

**Dr LIM:** Mr Chairman, can I take that on notice that the minister is providing me with a list?

**Mr VATSKALIS:** Yes, I am happy to do that.

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**Question on Notice**

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** To assist Hansard and to ensure the minister has fully understood the question, will the shadow minister please restate the question?

**Dr LIM:** I asked the minister to table a list of the sponsorships and grants that have been provided to ethnic communities and non-ethnic communities that are doing ethnic activities in the last 12 months.

**Mr VATSKALIS:** In Alice Springs.

**Dr LIM:** In Central Australia.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** Minister, do you accept that as a question taken on notice?

**Mr VATSKALIS:** Yes, I will.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** That being the case, I allocate number 8.2 to the question.

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**Mr CHAIRMAN:** Please continue.

**Dr LIM:** Minister, with regards to the Filipino community in Central Australia, what direct support is provided for them?

**Mr VATSKALIS:** My apologies, member for Grotter. Are you asking me to tell you what support is provided to the Filipino community in Central Australia?

**Dr LIM:** That is right. Let me draw your attention to this: the Filipino Association in its various groups in the Northern Territory receives support from the Office of Ethnic Affairs. I ask if there is any specific amount being dedicated to the Central Australian contingent of the Filipino community.

**Mr VATSKALIS:** That will be included in the list we are going to provide you about the money we provide to the different organisations in Central Australia.

**Dr LIM:** You do not have the figure?

**Mr VATSKALIS:** I do not have the figure in front of me now. Janicean, if you can.

**Ms PRICE:** The sponsorship program is advertised across the Territory in various newspapers. Mabuhay applied for two grants; one was not approved and the second one has been approved, and that was paid in June and not included in the figures here.

**Dr LIM:** Are you able to provide what the figure is?

**Ms PRICE:** The figure is \$2000.

**Dr LIM:** And the other one was declined?

**Ms PRICE:** The other one was for another project which was not granted.

**Dr LIM:** With the federal contribution to this program, is that only for Harmony Day, or is it for other activities?

**Mr VATSKALIS:** Which?

**Dr LIM:** The federal contribution.

**Mr VATSKALIS:** Yes, for Harmony Day. Member for Greateorex, before you continue, the cost of the advertisement that you mentioned before is \$3225.26.

**Dr LIM:** Thank you.

**Mr VATSKALIS:** My understanding is the cost of the advertisement in the Glenti magazine was \$3000.

**Dr LIM:** \$3000?

**Mr VATSKALIS:** Yes.

**Dr LIM:** I have lost my train of thought. Let me gather my thoughts, Mr Chairman.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** You have the floor.

**Dr LIM:** With what is no longer called the Migrant Resource Centre but the multicultural - I cannot remember the full name of it now – the Multicultural Resource Centre, I think it is.

**Mr VATSKALIS:** Multicultural Community Service of Central Australia Incorporated.

**Dr LIM:** What level of funding has been provided to that organisation, apart from its grants from the federal government?

**Ms PRICE:** Operational assistance is provided on an annual basis - \$34 000. They have also applied for six other one-off projects, and they total \$5800 in grants provided.

**Dr LIM:** I understand that their tenancy has been provided for by the federal government grant, is that correct?

**Ms PRICE:** No, it is not.

**Dr LIM:** Can you say who has provided it?

**Ms PRICE:** The contribution is made through DCIS who pays for the rent.

**Dr LIM:** DCIS does pay for the rent. And that is not included into the Office of Ethnic Affairs

allocation?

**Ms PRICE:** No, it is not.

**Dr LIM:** Is this something that is provided by DCIS free of charge to the Office of Ethnic Affairs, or where is that shown in terms of the allocation?

**Ms PRICE:** It is not shown within the grants figure as it is not a grant. It is provided through NT Property Management.

**Dr LIM:** I was talking about Harmony Day and the federal contribution. Does the Northern Territory government provide any top-ups for Harmony Day, or is it all federal funding?

**Mr VATSKALIS:** My understanding is the federal government provides \$5000 towards Harmony Day. We provide approximately \$40 000.

**Dr LIM:** It is distributed in what way throughout the Territory?

**Mr VATSKALIS:** They have advertisements going in the newspaper asking for organisations, schools, ethnic organisations, non-ethnic organisations to actually put in an application for something to do with Harmony. Applications are received and assessed by a panel, and recommendations made to the minister, who signs them off or does not sign them off, depending on the recommendation of the panel and if it meets the criteria. It does not fund a particular ethnic organisation and ignores the non-ethnic ones. We have received a number of non-ethnic organisations and schools, and we have had a significant number of Aboriginal organisations who actually applied for grants. We have local councils, like the Pine Creek Community. The Katherine Town Council applied for this kind of celebrations.

**Dr LIM:** That is all from me, Mr Chairman.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** Does any other member of the committee have a question?

**Mr DUNHAM:** The grant for the free rental, sorry, it is not a grant, but the provision of assistance through free rental, can we have a list of all the in-kind assistance provided to groups, whether that be vehicles, free rent, machines?

**Mr VATSKALIS:** We do not provide in-kind assistance, we provide only grants. This in-kind assistance of cars or anything else is provided by other departments, not by us. They are not administered by us. For example, if somebody wants a car and they apply to the Chief Minister; somebody wants the rent, they apply to DCIS. It does not come through us.

**Mr DUNHAM:** So your ad in the paper calling for assistance ...

**Mr VATSKALIS:** It is only for grants.

**Mr DUNHAM:** How do people know to apply for free rent, for instance?

**Mr VATSKALIS:** Many people actually know where to apply and how to apply, and some of them write asking for things.

**Mr DUNHAM:** So you do not see yourself as a referral agency. They write to you and you refer it on.

**Mr VATSKALIS:** No. If they write to us and say we want free rent, it is not going to be administered by the Office of Ethnic Affairs, but we can forward the letter to the appropriate authority or organisation. If

they ask for cars, we do not deal with cars, we actually refer it to the Chief Minister's department or to the community liaison officer and they can take it from there.

**Mr DUNHAM:** Can you tell us the sources of revenue that could apply? How many places could an ethnic organisation apply to for assistance from the government?

**Mr VATSKALIS:** We do not have only the ethnic organisations, we had the Catholic Diocese of Darwin apply to us for grants because they are doing work within communities, but they applied for other things and we just refer them to other areas. In some cases, we refer them to the federal government.

**Mr DUNHAM:** So how do make sure you are not double funding them if they make several applications?

**Mr VATSKALIS:** If they apply for grants twice, that is easy for us to find out if they double dip or not.

**Ms GOODWIN:** I can respond to that. The Office of Ethnic Affairs, when it receives applications, does liaise with other agencies to check that there is no doubling up in payments, in terms of the applications.

**Mr DUNHAM:** So, it could be under consideration by two agencies but, prior to providing the assistance, you would make sure that the other agency also had not seen it as a successful application.

**Ms PRICE:** Yes. You will find that NT Arts and other grant organisations will contact the Office of Ethnic Affairs to see if we are joint funding, or funding a particular project. We also, likewise, check with other government agencies with grants programs to ensure that we are not doing something the same.

**Mr DUNHAM:** But there is no consolidated list; it is just an oral check?

**Ms PRICE:** There is not a consolidated list of what they are applying for, but we do provide information to each other on an ethnic project. Some organisations will apply for funding for a project - apply for specific aspects from arts because it happens to be at dance side of it, or it may be an artistic side, and they will apply with us for something else, but in that one program. We will liaise with Arts and see whether they are going to fund it or not fund it.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** Are there any other questions related to this output? I do not know quite know how we are going to do this. That concludes consideration of this output group.

#### **Non-Output Specific Questions**

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** Are there any other non-output specific budget related questions?

**Dr LIM:** Yes. I have a complaint about this every year. It is a one line thing and it is really only two lines in the budget book. It does not really give an indication of what happens within the office. It would be good if some of the detail can be provided in our budget book. Will the minister consider doing that instead of having two lines in a budget book? We support ethnic communities in a very large way in the Territory and, considering the number of ministerial reports that you make about ethnic communities, it always takes up a fair bit of your time. To have only two lines in a budget book, is inadequate.

**Mr VATSKALIS:** Member for Grotorex, I wish to publicly thank you for your support for the ethnic communities, in parliament and in public. There might be two lines there, but the reality of the work that the department is doing is absolutely fantastic. I am very happy for the office to give you a full briefing of all the activities of the work we are doing, any time. You only have to ask. I would like to thank very much Janicean Price and Alix Goodwin for their time. Thank you very much for everything.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** On behalf of the committee, I would like to thank the officers of the department for attending today. Thank you.

**Mr VATSKALIS:** Before we close, just one thing. A question asked for barra figures. In 2001, there were 1427 tonnes of barramundi caught; in 2002, 1056 tonnes of barramundi; and in 2003, 962 tonnes of barramundi.

**Mr DUNHAM:** His memory is pretty good, hey?

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** Thank you, minister. The committee will meet for five minutes. I am also told that we will be back on at 6.30 pm.

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The committee suspended.

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### MINISTER SCRYMGOUR'S PORTFOLIOS

**Madam ACTING CHAIRMAN:** I call the committee to order and welcome the minister. I invite her to introduce the officials accompanying her, and, if she wishes, to make an opening statement in relation to Health and Community Services.

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** Thank you, Madam Acting Chairman. I would like to introduce Robert Griew, Chief Executive Officer, Department of Health and Community Services, and Carol Peltola, Assistant Secretary, Community Services. Before I start, I would like to make a few introductory comments.

In December last year, I was appointed Minister for Family and Community Services. This means that the Department of Health and Community Services now reports to two ministers: the Minister for Health and I. Having separate ministers for these two portfolios is not unusual. It is standard practice in other states and the Commonwealth. However, it does mean that, unlike the previous two Estimates hearings in the Northern Territory, we do have questions in relation to the Department of Health and Community Services being put to two ministers. I can advise that I will be taking questions on all Outputs in relation to Family and Community Services, Aged and Disability Services, Mental Health Services and Alcohol and other Drugs Services, which is under the Public Health Services Output Group.

I understand the committee and the shadows have received a table that allocates this Output Group responsibility breakdown. As the Minister for Health advised during his appearance, questions in relation to the whole of the department should have been put to him.

Since I have become minister we have released *Building Healthier Communities*, which is our framework for Health and Community Services in the Northern Territory. In implementing *Building Healthier Communities*, we have increased funding, particularly to the non-government sector, we have increased staffing resources and are overhauling the *Community Welfare Act*, the first review in over 20 years.

It is important to point out to the committee that the government did make several mid-financial year funding injections into the area of Community and Family Services. As a result of this, the actual amounts for 2003-04 are significantly above budgeted amounts in several areas.

In some areas, particularly Alcohol and Other Drugs, the Northern Territory receives funding grants from the Commonwealth. The Commonwealth Grants process is not synchronised with the Northern Territory budget. At the time of publication, we can only publish budget figures based on committed grants. This does have the capacity to skew some figures and make them a little misleading. In Alcohol and Other Drugs, there is considerable likelihood that for 2004-05, actuals will be greater

than the budget figures published. I look forward to questions from the committee.

**Madam ACTING CHAIRMAN:** Thank you, minister. The time is now 6.36pm. For the purposes of the *Hansard* record, I wish to advise that pursuant to section 12 of the Terms of Reference of the Estimates Committee, Madam Speaker has nominated the member for Barkly to replace the member for Sanderson.

The other item of housekeeping is that because of Hansard recording, we need all phones off rather than on silent. Please switch phones off. Setting them to 'silent' interferes with the recording feed.

The committee has a process that we follow, which is Output area by Output area. Members of the Committee will know this. The committee will consider the estimates of proposed expenditure contained in the Appropriation Bill 2004-05 as they relate to Health and Community Services, Output Group 3.0. I call for questions relating to Output 3.1, Support Services.

### **Output Group 3.0 – FAMILY AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES**

#### **Output 3.1 - Support Services**

**Ms CARTER:** Thank you. Minister, how much money has been allocated to the *Youth at Risk* Strategy, which is a whole-of-government approach to addressing youth problems but is the responsibility of your department for overall coordination?

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** I thank the member for her question. In terms of the Youth at Risk Task Force, which delivered its report and major recommendations in December 2003, there are many issues: establishment of an interdepartmental unit of which my department was part of the lead agency and additional services for young people at risk. These are not set in place at the moment. Government is still examining ways of addressing the issues raised in the Task Force Report, including links with government's increased investment in child protection. Any response that we have in relation to this will be across government and not solely the responsibility of my department.

In the meantime, the department will be allocating funds from the Child Protection Reform Initiatives and if you want to go into some of that detail, I will defer to the CEO.

**Mr GRIEW:** Just to add briefly to what the minister said, there are a number of models that we have envisaged for Child Protection reform works underway in the department that target particularly high risk families.

One of the difficulties in this area is determining the target group. There are now a number of models in place in other jurisdictions where agencies collaborate to identify high risk families and then pool resources, use joint case management and a number of other methodologies of that sort so that we can work more effectively with those families who will often have both younger children and youth at significant risk, and achieve much better outcomes than we can achieve in parallel. That is a reasonably significant part of the Child Protection Reform agenda and dovetails into this Youth at Risk.

**Ms CARTER:** So just to clarify, the program, which was known as the *Youth at Risk* strategy, essentially has been put on hold with a view to the child protection stuff that may pick up on some of those need areas? There is no specific funding for it any more?

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** As I said, the government is still examining ways of addressing some of those issues. It has not said that it is not maintaining the same focus. It is maintaining that focus, but we are examining ways of addressing the issues raised in that task force report.

**Madam ACTING CHAIRMAN:** Any further questions from the shadow on Output 3.1? Other members of the committee?

#### **Output 3.2 - Support Services for Individuals and Families in Crisis**

**Madam ACTING CHAIRMAN:** Shadow?

**Ms CARTER:** No questions.

**Madam ACTING CHAIR:** Any members of the committee? That concludes consideration of Output 3.2.

### **Output 3.3 – Child Protection Services**

**Madam ACTING CHAIRMAN:** Shadow.

**Ms CARTER:** Minister, with regards to the area of child protection, on page 139 Budget Paper No 3, there are a lot of blank areas where the volume estimates of the services which were provided in the area of child protection should go. How can you predict the numbers for next year if you cannot provide estimates as to what was done this year? For example, why can't the number of days in care be estimated for this year?

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** Answering the question is a good opportunity to look at child protection overall. In relation to some of the detail that you want, I will defer to the CEO. In terms of child protection, I will refer back to our *Building Healthier Communities* policy, which we launched last year. *Building Healthier Communities* had six very clear priority areas. Two were giving kids a good start in life and strengthening families and communities. These two priority areas certainly outline the policy agenda of government in relation to families and children.

After many years of neglect, and I know people do not like hearing that, our government is getting on with the job of reforming child protection in the Northern Territory. It is probably one of the most important areas. Some of the initiatives as part of that reform include:

- in December last year, government announced an injection of \$53m over five years into that area;
- we have 19 new staff employed this year into six newly created jobs and there will be 10 more positions next year;
- a review and complete overhaul of the *Community Welfare Act*. This is the first time this act has been reviewed in more than 20 years;
- reform of the child protection system. Directions for reform over the next five years have been set out in the government's framework *Building Healthier Communities* and building a better child protection system; and
- establishing a Community and Services Advisory Council. This council is quite exciting and will report directly to myself as the Minister for Family and Community Services, and the make up of this council will be announced shortly.

Having said that, in terms of some of the details you have sought, I will defer to the CEO.

**Mr GRIEW:** There is a convention, I do not know that it is necessary, that when you change performance measures, apparently you do not include the previous year's in these papers but, obviously for members' interests, you will want to know what our estimate of the measure would have been, and I guess that is the question at which you are driving.

The reason for changing measures in a number of our performance indicators across the output groups is essentially because some of the measures we had, frankly, did not you much, scrutinising the Estimates, much value, and so we tried to move towards estimates that either cover more of the programs or are a better measure of program success or of volume. So, for example, there is not

much point in being given a number that is always going to be static because you want to look for where things are changing. That is the background to why we have done this. I can run through quickly our best estimate of a couple of those numbers if you want to indicate the ones in which you are interested, if we have them. I mean, sometimes it is a new number and new measure, but mostly we have them, at least an estimate.

**Ms CARTER:** Oh sorry, I thought you were on to that page. Page 139 of Budget Paper No 3, there are gaps.

**Mr GRIEW:** I will ask for Ms Peltola's assistance and we will just run through them. Notifications of child harm, the best estimate for this year is in the order of 1900 to 1950.

**Ms CARTER:** Okay, thank you.

**Mr GRIEW:** Child protection reports investigated, you have?

**Ms CARTER:** Yes.

**Mr GRIEW:** Children in care at 30 June is one that we are dropping because a point in time is less useful than during the year.

**Ms CARTER:** Yes, I know what you mean.

**Mr GRIEW:** And the figure for children admitted to care during the year, our best estimate for this year is just over 450. Days of care, I think the last figure we have is 2002-03 at this point, is that right?

**Ms PELTOLA:** Yes, that is right.

**Mr GRIEW:** Our estimate there is just over 96 000, just a shade over. Clients accessing support services, I think this will be the first year this figure has been calculated. Average number of placements of children in care, our best estimate comes from 2002-03, which was about 2.3, but there is always a margin around the accuracy of that figure. An investigation was commenced within 48 hours, our best estimate there is running at about 90% for this year.

**Ms CARTER:** Thank you, for that. Minister, last week in parliament when we were discussing this issue in Question Time on Thursday, according to the *Hansard*, in response to one of my questions concerning statistics and child protection, you said:

*The majority of measures are new and commence on 1 July 2004. Thus estimates for 2003-04 are not available. If you want them in terms of 1978 to 1988, there has been an increase of 223% in child protection notifications, and an increase of 171% of children in out-of-home care.*

Minister, with regard to that, are you happy with that transcript? Does it reflect accurately?

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** In answer to your question, they were figures I used and they were on the briefing notes that I had. I think the numbers that the CEO has just provided for you is probably a better reflection.

**Ms CARTER:** Absolutely, but I just wanted to confirm, and I am not going to explore it or be clever with it, but just in the decade that you have given, 1978 to 1988, was that actually what you were providing? I just wondered. It was 20 years ago, and I wondered whether it was what you wanted to provide or is it a typo?

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** Through the chair, in answer to your question, the figures I used were not wrong



figures. They were correct figures, but there was - they show huge increases and they are a concern.

**Ms CARTER:** All right. I just wanted to check.

**Mr GRIEW:** Can I be clear, too, that the figures I just gave we sought out subsequent to that interchange in the parliament.

**Ms CARTER:** No, I realise that, and I am grateful for it. The decade 1978-88 was such a long time ago, I wondered whether it was a typo.

**Madam ACTING CHAIRMAN:** I just want to pick up on process here. Minister, you do not have to go through me; you can talk directly to the shadow.

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** Okay.

**Madam ACTING CHAIRMAN:** It is a more informal process than the Assembly.

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** Some of that did come out of the national report on child protection, and that was reflecting what was in the Northern Territory, that increase.

**Ms CARTER:** Minister, at the start of this financial year, the area of child protection was allocated a budget of \$14m. It is estimated by the end of this financial year, they will have received \$18m, a 28 per cent increase in funding. What was the extra \$4m spent on?

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** In answer to the shadow's question, within 2003-04, the increased funding reflects alignment of budget due to the restructure of the department and the additional child protection funding. For 2004-05, the increase mainly reflects Cabinet's decision in December 2003 to increase that funding for Child Protection Services.

**Ms CARTER:** I can remember in approximately December last year when I had a briefing, there was going to be an extra \$3m going to child protection for the rest of this financial year. What has that extra money actually bought in the last seven months, say, in the area of child protection? What have you actually paid for to the tune of \$3m to \$4m?

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** What it has done is the additional positions that have certainly increased in the department, the 19 new positions ...

**Ms CARTER:** How many were actually filled in the last six or seven months?

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** Nineteen, I think, is the figure. That was the figure that I gave you in parliament last week as well.

**Ms CARTER:** Those 19 positions have been filled?

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** As I understand, there were 19 positions. I will defer to the CEO if you want it at the operational level.

**Mr GRIEW:** If I can just clarify first if we are talking about the 2003-04 financial year or the 2004-05 year?

**Ms CARTER:** No, sorry, 2003-04.

**Mr GRIEW:** Okay. In the 2003-04 financial year, there was an additional \$1m announced last December, and the amount for 2004-05 is just under \$3m; it is \$2.8m, which might have given rise to

some confusion. Cumulatively, it means we are up to \$4m when we started.

The reason for the variance between the beginning of the 2003-04 budget and the estimated outcome is, as the minister said, to do with that extra \$1m, a number of smaller changes and the new program-based structure in the department. There has been a more exact alignment of, basically, management and divisional costs. That is the extra \$2m that you are fishing for there, I guess, wondering where that is.

The \$1m extra has, as the minister said, gone to a number of things, but the most significant one is the recruitment of extra staff. Nineteen staff have been recruited and six of those are into new positions, and there are another 10 new positions next year. There is also a number of trainee staff. Ms Peltola might be able to give more exact figures. I remember about four.

**Ms CARTER:** Can I just confirm that what you are saying is that since December last year, six new positions have been created and filled. That is the additional funding. The 13 were staff that had just gone through normal ...

**Mr GRIEW:** Plus a number of training positions.

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** There has been the employment of six additional child protection staff in the highest areas of growth and they have been Darwin, Katherine and Alice Springs. There are two cadetships, two trainees, for Aboriginal people ...

**Ms CARTER:** Are they part of the six or in addition?

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** No, in addition to. As part of that new money, there was also the 8 per cent increase to foster carer payments and some of it was used to also increase the funding to some key non-government agencies involved in child protection in the care system, for example, the NT Foster Carers Association, Create and NAPCAN. Some of it has gone towards building the capacity in remote Aboriginal communities to develop community-based responses to child protection and family support issues.

**Ms CARTER:** Minister, what you are saying is the \$1m has paid for that and \$3m has been moved because of the changes in the structure of the department? The reason I say that is because in last year's budget, the amount allocated to child protection was \$14m and the estimate for this year was \$18m. That is \$4m, and so it is the realignment?

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** Yes.

**Ms CARTER:** Minister, how do you feel the service has improved over the past seven months, given all of the changes and the additional funding?

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** There have been a lot of changes, and with change, you are always going to have your peaks and troughs. There will be some period of instability and people reacting to a number of changes; we have seen that with the restructure. I think there have been many positive changes. With those changes, we are going to, certainly in terms of increasing the capacity of the department, raising the awareness in the broader community on issues of child protection, we will have the result that we are seeing today. We are having an increase in notifications and other areas. They have certainly been, across the board, some very good results and changes.

**Ms CARTER:** Minister, why is it that the staff are so disillusioned that they went on strike a week or so ago?

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** You asked me this question in parliament last week. We were all concerned about the staff going on strike. As you know, they went on strike on Wednesday 16 June. Let me take you back again. Our government is serious about reforming the child protection area in the Northern

Territory. I can't emphasise enough that one of the key resources that we have in terms of this reform is the staff who work in FACS. Government is committed to addressing the issues raised by staff and some of those issues have to do with workload and work practices and their office accommodation. We have moved and there are certainly discussions happening between the CPSU and departmental management. In terms of going any further with that, I defer to the CEO.

**Mr GRIEW:** We are now in an Industrial Relations Commission instructed conciliation process, with every intention of resolving the issue by the report back date of the end of July. The specific issues that the union raised on behalf of their members and those officers relate to a couple of key issues. I might give you the summary, if you want.

**Ms CARTER:** Yes, please.

**Mr GRIEW:** One key issue is essentially a number of issues that relate to workload or case load, issues including the review of caseloads, the removal of caseloads from team leaders and managers. Now that is an issue on which we agree with the union and don't want managers taking on case loads, but they have sometimes tended to do so. That is an area we obviously need to address. We are looking at some administrative requirements that case workers feel are unnecessary and could be streamlined.

**Ms CARTER:** Does that relate to the computer system they have?

**Mr GRIEW:** I am advised that there are some issues that relate to the computer. That would not be the only area in which that is the case. Then there are a number of issues that arise from the FACS restructure and consultative processes between departmental management and the CPSU.

Against that, there is a background of a significant increase in work load in the past 12 months and over the last several years for these staff. So even though more resources have been dedicated to increasing the number of staff, there is a significant work load issue in that area of the department, as there in most, if not in all, child protection operations around Australia.

The response to that has been to set up a human resource working group within the program that will work closely with the union so that we can make some positive progress on those issues and the briefing I have had is that the union and the staff are not dissatisfied with that process, but want to see, obviously, the outcomes of it, as do we.

There is another issue about day worker participation in the after hours roster, which was an initiative of the government to try and actually remove the requirement for day staff to work ...

**Ms CARTER:** On call?

**Mr GRIEW:** In the after hours roster, even though it is actually a provision within the Enterprise Agreement. In fact, that is an issue that we have largely managed to overcome. There was, as I understand it, only one case called on in June and in July.

The other issue that is outstanding, and we need to make some progress on, is accommodation for those staff, given the nature of the work that FACS staff do and the volatile issues that arise. The minister has certainly been very clear in her expectations that we will resolve those issues. Senior staff of the department from both the Property and Community Services area have been inspecting options over the last few days. There is a high priority, obviously, on putting people into a better environment.

**Ms CARTER:** Minister, when the issue revolves around, for example, volatile clients, does that mean that it is a safety issue for the staff in the unit, that they are wanting increased safety?

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** I could say 'yes', but this is an operational matter so and I defer to Carol Peltola.

**Ms PELTOLA:** Thank you, minister. The reason that accommodation is such a high priority for us is that staff believe that the configuration of office space doesn't give them the safety and security that they need. Safety issues are a high priority in attempting to get either additional space or in reconfiguring our space in Casuarina Plaza to add both security and a sense of security to staff.

**Mr GRIEW:** To elaborate a bit, my understanding from some staff I have spoken to earlier than this is that there is also an issue of volume and noise and the interference of that with other client consultations going on. So it isn't just a safety issue, but an issue of having an environment in which it is easier to settle the issues that sometimes there are.

**Ms CARTER:** The safety issues that the union obviously would be concerned about, has that been spurred on by the fact that there have actually been some incidents occur where staff have either been threatened or injured by clients or by family members?

**Mr GRIEW:** The advice I have is not of injuries or physical aggression, but of verbal aggression. Having come through the welfare system in the Commonwealth before in an earlier career, I can say that this is similar to a lot of the old DSS officers experience as well, and one of the things that you can do about that is to redesign office space so that clients have less of a feeling of pressure on them in the environment, but the issues we have faced are, as I said, more about noise than about violence.

**Ms CARTER:** I guess with the additional staff, it gets a bit cosy, probably, as well.

**Mr GREW:** But it also gives us leverage to get more space.

**Ms CARTER:** Yes. Thank you for that. Minister, how many child protection positions were there in the Northern Territory at the start of this financial year? My next question will be: how many are there now?

**Mr GRIEW:** The figure I have been given, and we could take the question in more detail if you want, is that we have 70 professional and 22 community worker positions at the start of the year. How many of those were filled we would have to take on notice.

**Ms CARTER:** All right then. Where I am going, and I will just tell you what that is and then give you the question: how many positions were there in child protection at the start of this financial year, knowing that there have been additions, how many are there now at the end of the financial year? The other question will be: how many of the current positions are vacant? Minister, would you be happy to take that question on notice?

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** We can take it, but I just make the point that across the whole area, 85 per cent of those positions are filled, but we can take that question on notice.

**Madam ACTING CHAIRMAN:** To assist *Hansard* and to ensure the minister is fully aware of the question, would the shadow minister please restate the question?

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#### Question on Notice

**Ms CARTER:** Minister, could you advise how many child protection positions existed on 1 July 2003? How many child protection positions exist at the end of June 2004? Of those positions at the end of 2004, how many are vacant?

**Madam ACTING CHAIRMAN:** Minister, do you accept that as a question taken on notice?

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** Yes.

**Madam ACTING CHAIRMAN:** That being the case, I allocate number 9.1 to the question.

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**Ms CARTER:** Minister, in the latest annual report for your department, published late last year covering the financial year 2002-03, on page 119 it was reported that only 67 per cent of child protection investigations had been completed within the department's satisfaction benchmark of 90 per cent. Minister, why was there such a marked shortfall in performance?

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** I will defer to the CEO in relation to that.

**Mr GRIEW:** This is one of the performance indicators that we have actually dropped. Instead, what we have substituted is investigations having been initiated within 48 hours. The reason for that is that the 28 days is a relatively arbitrary target to set oneself for completing an investigation, particularly if it is a complex case or police are involved. It often is sensible for the investigation to go longer. The key issue is that the notification is immediately prioritised, and effectively prioritised – there is a response, in other words; it is high priority – and that investigations, if they are the correct response, they are not always, are initiated quickly and managed properly through the process, which is one of the fundamental reforms that management is working on in that program.

It may be that 67 per cent simply reflects the number of cases that ought to have been completed within 28 days, with a third being cases that ought to have gone on longer because they were complex or involved other agencies. There is, obviously, a workload impact here. No one is shying away from that, and that is why government is putting more money in to it. However, it is not a very good performance indicator in terms of measuring the effectiveness of the program's delivery compared with the other one.

**Ms CARTER:** Where would the 90 per cent benchmark have come from to begin with?

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** Could you be more specific?

**Ms CARTER:** It is that someone just set as a benchmark a performance indicator of 90 per cent?

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** With a lot of these things, I suppose, someone set it as an estimate at that time, and that is what it is measured against.

**Ms CARTER:** I guess my view would be that the 90 per cent was probably set by someone in the program at some point in time. One would assume that you would not set a benchmark of 90 per cent if you had any inkling that you would fall significantly short of it 12 months later, and 67 per cent is a significant shortfall on 90 per cent of investigations being completed within 28 days.

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** I would like to expand a little on that. Of some of the cases that you are talking about within this 90 per cent where FACS was required to act quickly and respond within 48 hours, an investigation would have commenced. I suppose that is the estimate, when they say 90 per cent of the cases, but if an immediate response is not warranted based on the initial intake assessment, then FACS will assess what action is needed to respond to the concerns. This may include monitoring the child's situation through their contact with schools or other agencies, etcetera. The department endeavours to complete child protection investigations within 28 days. Sometimes, there are important reasons to keep the investigation open for longer. If you look at last year's budget paper, the 2003-04 estimate was at 75 per cent.

**Ms CARTER:** It was obviously a bit of a mistake to put the 90 per cent in?

**Mr GRIEW:** In the first place, yes.

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** Yes.

**Ms CARTER:** Okay, we will let it go. Minister, how many children are currently in foster care in the Northern Territory?

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** The number of children at 30 May was 347.

**Ms CARTER:** Is that going up or going down, do you think?

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** It has been increasing: 2001-02, 246; 2002-03, 301; and then at the end of 30 May, 347. So there has been a steady increase.

**Ms CARTER:** Minister, how many of these children that are currently in care are Aboriginal children?

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** Madam Acting Chairman, for the purposes of saving time, I introduce Jenny Scott who is the director of that section and will be able to provide that information.

**Ms SCOTT:** I do not actually have the break down of indigenous children in care with me, but I certainly can provide that before the end of the sittings.

**Ms CARTER:** And I will let you know the next question because we might bundle them up together then: Minister, what percentage of Aboriginal children are being fostered by Aboriginal foster parents in view of section 67 of the *Community Welfare Act*? That may have to be put on notice as well.

**Madam ACTING CHAIRMAN:** Was there a question on notice or ...

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** Just before we do that, if I can draw the shadow's attention back to the performance measures and when we had the discussion about that and Aboriginal children placed in accordance with Aboriginal child placement principles, and that was about 67 per cent, which is about two-thirds.

**Ms CARTER:** Madam Acting Chairman, I would like that second question on notice.

**Madam ACTING CHAIRMAN:** Yes, we are just going back to clarify it. Going back to the second question regarding the number of indigenous children in care ...

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** The figures that you were given to start off with, and you asked for a specific breakdown of indigenous children, from that, about 142, but that was in 2002-03.

**Mr GRIEW:** That was on 30 June 2003, out of 301, so it's just under half.

**Ms CARTER:** 142 out of 301, thank you. Minister, do you know Mr Charlie King?

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** I do not think I would be alone in this room if I said I know Charlie King.

**Ms CARTER:** Could you explain his role with regards to child protection?

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** As I understand it, Charlie King is a member of the Child Protection Review Team.

**Ms CARTER:** How would he have got a job like that? What sort of qualities do you think he would

have?

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** I suppose like everyone on that committee, he has a commitment to the protection of children. If I could go back into some of the background with that, as I understand it and I stand to be corrected, but I think he first came on to the Child Protection Review Team as a representative of KARU, the Aboriginal child welfare agency.

**Ms CARTER:** Would you consider that he is a credible member of the team?

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** I would say all the members of the Child Protection Review Team are credible members.

**Ms CARTER:** Minister, on 19 June, there was an article on page 9 of the *NT News* that reads, in part:

*Mr King last night repeated his call for an independent inquiry into child sexual abuse in the Territory.*

He said, and I quote:

*I don't know how much longer we want to mess around with this. I know one day we are going to have a death of a child on our conscience because of the way we are handling this. .*

And he goes on to say:

*I am still not convinced we know the extent of child abuse in the Northern Territory*

He calls for an independent inquiry. Minister, do you agree with his views?

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** It has been interesting because I had a conversation with Charlie King after that report. It was something that was put in parliament last week as well, that there should be an independent inquiry and my response was: 'No, there shouldn't be an inquiry' and I still feel that there is no need for an independent inquiry.

We have just completed the Bansemer Review and that was a review across the whole of the department of Health and Community Services, which included looking at the areas of family and community services. Its recommendations ...

**Dr Lim** interjecting.

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** The shadow asked the question and I am trying to answer her question without having the interruptions.

**Dr Lim:** I am sorry about the interjection, but the Bansemer report is two years old and your numbers are going up. Aren't you concerned?

**Madam ACTING CHAIRMAN:** Member for Grotorex, you know the process here. You are a member of the committee and you know the process.

**Dr Lim:** Aren't you concerned? Geez!

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** The recommendations from the Bansemer Review have been incorporated into *Building Healthier Communities* and we are implementing it. There have also been a number of other independent reviews, reports and inquiries carried out recently into aspects of child abuse in the Territory. SNAICC, which is the Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Island Child Care, released a report on the Neglect and Abuse of Indigenous Children in the Northern Territory a couple of years

ago.

There are even more reports looking at child abuse across Australia, and I know that there are problems with child neglect, underage sex and underage prostitution. We all know that. We only have to pick up the paper and we see it constantly. I do not believe that we need another inquiry because an inquiry more or less assumes that the system is in crisis, and it is not in crisis.

**Dr Lim** interjecting.

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** Despite what you are thinking, we are taking action and there are a number of things that are happening. Member for Grotto, you can say what you like, but it has been our government - we have had a system that has been long neglected and under-resourced – that has put in the \$53m.

We are overhauling the *Community Welfare Act*, its first review in 20 years. Bear that in mind. We are putting in new staff and creating new positions. We are reforming the legislation and we have provided the policy framework in *Building Healthier Communities*. We are providing the resources, the money and the positions. We are also looking at a whole-of-government approach.

Another reason why we should not have an independent inquiry, and it is a step forward, is the appointment of the chair about which I will make an announcement in the not too distant future, is in relation to the Family and Community Services Ministerial Council. That council will be able to provide independent advice directly through to me as the minister.

This is going to take some time. We know that these things are happening, but we are putting the resources in. It is going to take some time to deal with the neglect and reforming that whole system, which needs to happen. The reforms are happening. We have put the money in. The resources are coming in, and I do not think, given that we have had numerous reports, numerous inquiries, that we need to have another inquiry.

**Ms CARTER:** Minister, given Charlie King's situation, and I do not think any one of us doubts his commitment to this area, he doesn't seem to be appeased by this. He has been calling for this sort of thing for some time now. For him to make a comment in the paper like he did the other day just flags to me, and I am sure to others, the fact that he is not satisfied with the current situation.

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** As I said to you before, I have had a conversation with Charlie King after that news report, providing my justification and reasons as to why we should not have an independent inquiry. One of the things that we miss in this whole thing is the department; the expertise and skills that we have within the department. In fact, our new Assistant Secretary of Community Services, Carol Peltola, was involved with the Gordon Inquiry in Western Australia and has brought a lot of that experience and knowledge to the Northern Territory reform process. We are undertaking reforms and we will implement them.

**Ms CARTER:** Minister, you have touched on this. The review of the *Community Welfare Act* has been ongoing for some time. When will the draft bill be presented to parliament?

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** Sorry, would you repeat that?

**Ms CARTER:** You have already touched on the fact with regard to the review of the *Community Welfare Act*. Could you advise when you expect the draft bill to be presented to parliament?

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** We are hoping around November. With the *Community Welfare Act*, there were some briefings provided to both yourself and the member for Araluen on the broad picture and where we are going with this. There has been a lot of broad consultation, including the establishment of a Caring For Our Children reference group, and there will be further consultation on the draft bill, which is proposed for later this year. I think around November we should have a draft bill.



**Mr CHAIRMAN:** Other members of the committee. Member for Nelson, I know you have been patiently waiting to ask a question.

**Mr WOOD:** I was interested in what was being said. Minister, under the performance measures, you have notifications of child harm, child protection reports investigated and children admitted to care during the year. How does that compare with the national average?

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** That is a good question. Member for Nelson, so that you get a good answer to your good question, I will defer to the Director of Family and Children's Services.

**Ms SCOTT:** Generally, the Northern Territory figures are within about mid-range to other states and territories. It is a difficult area to measure across jurisdictions because the different states and territories do operate slightly different systems, so it is difficult to compare across jurisdictions.

**Mr WOOD:** Generally, we are about the average?

**Ms SCOTT:** Mid-range.

**Mr DUNHAM:** In respect of the *Community Welfare Act*, my understanding was that it was to be drafted this year, and I think that was in the Chief Minister's Annual Report for Parliamentary Counsel. I am aware of correspondence from your predecessor that mentioned public consultation on a draft bill, the consultation period would extend until the end of November 2003. Now you are telling us it will not even be before the House until November 2004. If this is such a high priority, can you tell us why it has taken you so long to get a discussion document to the public?

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** To answer your question, member for Drysdale, you would know yourself just how complicated that process is. It is a priority, so do not think that we do not think that it is a priority. It is a priority, and we are endeavouring to have this done by November 2004. We have extended some of the consultation because some of those consultations and taking those papers out is taking in a broader capture and getting into a lot of our remote Aboriginal communities.

**Mr DUNHAM:** We can take a guarantee from you then that the previous minister's date, which is a year previous to yours, will not be something that you will fudge out for several months? Firm? November in parliament to table the bill, is that correct?

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** 2004?

**Mr DUNHAM:** Yes.

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** Yes.

**Mr DUNHAM:** Okay. You made the comment that this is the first review of the act in over 20 years. Who told you that?

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** Well, it the first major review of the act.

**Mr DUNHAM:** It is your own studies that have informed you, or did someone tell you that was the case?

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** To answer your question, the department is not aware of any other reviews that have happened in relation to the *Community Welfare Act*.

**Mr DUNHAM:** Are you aware the act has been amended?

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** Yes.

**Mr DUNHAM:** Can you tell me how many times?

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** There is a difference with the amendments versus a total review of the act, member for Drysdale.

**Mr DUNHAM:** But you called Bansemer's recommendations a review. I would have thought there had been several occasions when people have looked at greater depth than what Alan Bansemer did at Child Protection Services, and some of those resulted in amendments to the act, which are now part of the act in one of the schedules.

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** If you are asking me to get into the minute details of how many times I should know what amendments have gone through, no, I do not.

**Mr DUNHAM:** You were the one that used the phrase: 'the first review in over 20 years'.

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** In terms of the major review that is happening of the *Community Welfare Act*, replacing that act and making it reflect contemporary society, it is the first time that has happened.

**Mr DUNHAM:** Okay, so it is the first major review. I was interested in your analysis that there had been many years of neglect that you had inherited. That is a fairly defamatory thing to say about the many great people who have worked in this area, actually. I wonder who told you that.

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** When I say 'many years of neglect', it was neglect in terms of resourcing to staff. I agree with you; there have been many staff who have worked at the coalface dealing with this issue. The neglect has come from the lack of government resources or commitment to this area. It is not demeaning or insulting any staff, either now or staff who worked in the area years ago. They are not to blame for the neglect. Ultimately, government must take the responsibility for resourcing its staff to deal with the most important issue on the ground, and that is the protection of families and children.

**Mr DUNHAM:** So if I levelled the charge at you that it was neglectful at the moment, which is just an arbitrary charge, come straight off the top of my head, would you be offended by that?

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** How is this relevant?

**Mr DUNHAM:** It is very relevant because you are making accusations. You are blaming people who have been warriors in the system for many years. I believe you are doing so in a very patronising, unfair and political way. If you want to run the debate on that, you have started what could be a very long night.

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** No, I am not running a political debate. I have not, so do not take my words out of context or twist them to suit your means of putting this together to say that this is what I said. If you would listen carefully, the neglect has been caused by the many years of government inaction in relation to this area. It has nothing to do with the staff who have worked in the area. There are warriors across the health and community sector. There have been many people who have plugged away for many years who have gone unrecognised. It is a thankless area, and very often people do not feel appreciated in this area, and it is a harrowing and emotional area to be in.

**Mr DUNHAM:** Yes.

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** Well, hold on!

**Mr McADAM:** It is a bit like the renal issue, isn't it?

**Members** interjecting.

**Mr DUNHAM:** Which output are you on there, Elliot?

**Members** interjecting.

**Mr McADAM:** Madam Acting Chairman, can we hear the minister's answer, please?

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** Member for Drysdale, I would like you to stop saying or assuming or making the assumption that I am saying that the staff at the coalface of delivering services are the ones to blame for this neglect because that could not be – no, no, because you are. You are alluding to it or assuming and making assumptions by the question that you have put to me, implying that I am blaming the neglect on them. I am blaming the neglect on the years of government inaction - very different.

As members of parliament elected by the people, when we come in here and we make decisions and we are part of a government that calls for bipartisan support or calls that you care or commitment to this area, you put your money where your mouth is. We have done that. We have put the \$53m where it counts, on ...

**Ms CARTER:** It is only \$1m extra.

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** Well, over five years we have put more money and more resources into this area than what has been there.

**Ms CARTER:** We will wait and see; we haven't got the hospice yet.

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** I would like to make it very clear, member for Drysdale, that I am not saying that staff are the ones to blame for this neglect. I find that quite offensive ...

**Mr DUNHAM:** I do, too.

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** ... that you could think that I would think that staff, at the coalface of this issue, are to blame for this neglect.

**Mr DUNHAM:** I merely asked you what you meant by your words and by your long answer, it is obvious you are embarrassed by them. But let us go to ...

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** No, no, hold on a minute.

**Mr DUNHAM:** That is not a question. Let us go to the question. The question is: you said you should be judged on what you are doing. Now, you are the minister at the moment. You would be aware that the education union has criticised you about delays with investigating child abuse and that was done by a former candidate for the Labor party. You would be aware that Charlie King has criticised you for it. You would be aware that a child has been handed into the BP Service Station in Katherine. You would be aware that your own breakfast programs of some hundreds of thousands of dollars feed children whose parents cannot or will not feed them. You would be aware, for instance, that some of the statistics that you have in here show that you have a burgeoning problem. You have staff going on strike. And you are trying to tell us that your *bona fides* are that you are doing it better than ever before. Well, I tell you, on all of those benchmarks, straight off the top of my head, are you confident that the child protection services of today are better than they were last year?

**Mr BONSON:** Through the chair, can I just get clarification: did you say: 'Charlie King, former Labor

candidate'?

**A member:** No.

**Mr BONSON:** Sorry.

**Mr DUNHAM:** Rod Ellis is his name, mate, and you would know he stood for Casuarina, but, anyway ...

**Ms LAWRIE:** You have asked the question, finally, after a very long introduction to the question, member for Drysdale.

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** It was such a long statement and then a question, but it just shows that in the Labor Party we are a democratic party and we voice our opinions against each other. Charlie King has not criticised me; he has been concerned for some time about the system. I am concerned about the system. I have certainly put those concerns to the CEO of the department and the implementation of some of the reforms that we have been talking about for some time. We have to get beyond the rhetoric and have a look at the action. I have made that very clear to the department over the last couple of days, and since the strike, as to what we need.

**Mr DUNHAM:** So are things getting better or worse? That was the question.

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** When you look at the increase of notifications and when you look at those percentages, there is an increase ...

**Mr DUNHAM:** They are shocking.

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** Let me go through my answer.

**Madam ACTING CHAIRMAN:** Member for Drysdale, let the minister respond.

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** You have asked a question and I am attempting to answer it. You did make quite a long statement and then you asked a question. I am attempting to try to accommodate what you asked me.

Change takes time and even you know that, member for Drysdale, being the former health minister. Implementing any reforms takes time. Sometimes when you are asking for change to happen, this can create a number of problems. We saw that when you implemented reforms when you were health minister with the Coordinated Care Trials, for instance, which was a fantastic initiative, and the pooling concept. I do not need to go over that because you are well versed with that. When those reforms were happening and we pulled together the Coordinated Care Trials, there was a lot of movement on the ground and people were unhappy; a lot of staff and other people had been unhappy because that change was bringing about a whole new concept.

The increases in resources has had a number of impacts. When we look at the increasing numbers of notifications over time, it is alarming that those figures are increasing, but on the other side, you have to look at this in a context when you see where that increase is happening: indigenous communities. Now, that can either be a bad thing or it could be a good thing. The good thing is that finally, indigenous people and communities are starting to talk about this issue.

You have been around for a long time. You know that this is one issue that was constantly swept under the carpet. People did not talk about it. Now they are talking about it. I think that is a great thing. With that, more and more people are reporting. More and more women are saying: 'We are no longer going to tolerate this'.

For you to sit there and say that Charlie King has criticised me, Rod Ellis has criticised me ....

**Mr DUNHAM:** Yes.

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** I have taken on board their criticisms and had a look at what they are criticising. We are working with the CPSU. I have had a number of conversations with Charlie King and we are getting on with the job.

**Mr DUNHAM:** Okay. The question was is it getting better or worse, but now that you have talked about the act, there are two parts of this act that were quite good in their day. Okay, they might need changing. One was universal mandatory reporting, which most other states still have not come to; the other was that Aboriginal children should be looked after by Aboriginal carers. Are you satisfied that there so many Aboriginal children out there that are being cared for by non-Aboriginal people, in statutory breach of your act?

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** In terms of the Aboriginal children principle, it is something that nationally, all the ministers have agreed to this, and we endeavour to place ...

**Mr DUNHAM:** We did it 20 years ago.

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** Hold on a minute. We endeavour to place Aboriginal children, when they are put in that care situation, with Aboriginal families. Having said that, the reality is that you are not always going to have, and this is a big issue in terms of children going into care, a number of Aboriginal families available to take on those children when they are taken into care. This is not an issue that has just happened. This was a huge issue for many years that the department ...

**Mr DUNHAM:** So is that one of the bits of the act you are going to change?

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** No, I am not going to pre-empt the consultation. It is something that is one of the fundamental objects of that act, and it will stay there in terms of Aboriginal child placements.

**Mr DUNHAM:** Minister, your CEO has already admitted that the performance measures that were used for the last couple of years that were given to us by the department were nonsensical and pretty much useless and did not give us much information. We now have some others, and it would appear that they are equally useless. For instance, the welfare professionals are going out because of increases in workload, and that is not really evident from the stats you have given us here: child protection reports investigated have gone up, but certainly notifications have gone down. I wonder if you could, outside of this process, give us the data that forms the basis of the industrial action for increased workload, and obviously it is complexity of task.

I would also suggest that notifications are a fairly poor indicator when probably what we want to know is how many have been substantiated versus unsubstantiated. I ask if you could provide for the opposition some data in this area to vindicate the positions of the professionals that their workloads increased, and at least show us that those performance measures have some value because, at the moment, I think you would agree with me that they are still pretty vague, are they not?

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** Well, could you be a bit more specific in terms of what ..

**Mr DUNHAM:** Well, would you be happy if you were the minister just to get detail on notifications of child harm? Would you not want to know how many of those were substantiated, how many were unsubstantiated, whether they were neglect, sexual abuse, physical or emotional abuse? Would you not want to know some of those categorisations so that the data was cleansed in a way that made it a bit more meaningful than just this is how many phone calls we got on it?

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** Maybe I can go through some of that if you would like to ...

**Mr DUNHAM:** All I am saying is that you have virtually admitted the last series of data we had was useless. What I am putting to you is: I do not think this is a hell of a lot better. Maybe outside the budget process, but in some way I think you should be satisfying the opposition that your rhetoric in this area about increased activity is bearing fruit.

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** Look, we can combine some of that data. The rhetoric, I mean, we know all about rhetoric that you used, member for Drysdale.

**Mr DUNHAM:** Could I put that on notice?

**Madam ACTING CHAIRMAN:** I think the minister is going to provide it now.

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** We are going to go through some of what you talked about, so if you would just be patient for a minute.

**Ms DUNHAM:** Well, if it is in tabulated form, it will be hard to deliver orally, and I wonder if you could do it by way of a table.

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** No, we can work through this with you. Just hold on a minute and we will provide you with the answer that you require. All it requires is a bit of patience.

**Mr GRIEW:** Just to make a background comment about the performance measures, the *Working for Outcomes* framework of the budget documentation these days attempts to link performance measures provided in the budget documentation to purchased outputs. So there is a whole framework there about accounting for a set proportion of departmental activity, and it is absolutely the case that we, of course, provide more information for program monitoring purposes than is provided to account for expenditure in the budget documentation.

It is not completely clear to me the data that you are after. Our substantiation rate, which was one, as I heard clearly there, of notifications that are formally investigated is about mid-range with national figures, about 44 per cent, and less across neglect, emotional and sexual categories than across physical category. About 48 per cent of all notifications proceed to child protection investigations. You have got to tranche this area, if you like; 48 per cent of notifications proceeding to child protection investigation, and then 44 per cent of those being substantiated.

**Mr DUNHAM:** Okay. Minister, can I ask you if the children being fed on the Breakfast Program are formal statutory notifications on the basis of neglect?

**Madam ACTING CHAIRMAN:** I might just point out that at this stage that we are on Output 3.3, Child Protection Services, and the breakfast program, I do not think is under Child Protection Services. I will seek clarification from the minister on the relevance of that.

**Mr DUNHAM:** It is very important.

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** It is totally irrelevant to this. The breakfast program is a great initiative. I do not think that there is anything wrong with ...

**Mr DUNHAM:** So you are feeding kids who are not hungry, or feeding kids who are hungry?

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** I believe it is irrelevant.

**Madam ACTING CHAIRMAN:** The minister has said ...

**Mr DUNHAM:** You do not think it is relevant?

**Madam ACTING CHAIRMAN:** Member for Drysdale.

**Mr DUNHAM:** Yes.

**Madam ACTING CHAIRMAN:** Come on. I am the chair and I am addressing you.

**Mr DUNHAM:** Yes, righto. You are trying to protect the minister who is in trouble.

**Madam ACTING CHAIRMAN:** No, I am not trying to protect the minister. I am saying ...

**Mr DUNHAM:** Answer the question ...

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** You asked ...

**Mr DUNHAM:** Children who are not being fed and the government is feeding them are neglected. Is that correct?

**Madam ACTING CHAIRMAN:** Order, order! I am saying something and I would ask you to let me finish.

**Mr DUNHAM:** Go on.

**A McAdam:** I'd give him a yellow card.

**Madam ACTING CHAIRMAN:** Yes, well, he is heading for a warning. Anyway, we will give him a bit of latitude because I know he is hot-headed. We are under Output 3.3, which is Child Protection Services.

**Mr DUNHAM:** I know where we are.

**Madam ACTING CHAIRMAN:** The breakfast program does not fall into this output. You are out of order.

**Mr DUNHAM:** Can I ask a question?

**Madam ACTING CHAIRMAN:** Is it a Child Protection Services question?

**Mr DUNHAM:** It is. Well ...

**Madam ACTING CHAIRMAN:** I ruled on it.

**Mr DUNHAM:** Minister, are we feeding hungry kids who have not been fed at home, or are we feeding kids who are not hungry?

**Madam ACTING CHAIRMAN:** You have asked the same question that I have already ruled is not under this output.

**Mr DUNHAM:** These children, under definitions of child abuse, are defined as neglected. All I am asking is have they been referred to the appropriate agencies?

**Mr BONSON:** Through the chair, could I just have clarification what output the program is under.

**Mr DUNHAM:** Child abuse, Mattie. Child Protection Services, mate.

**Madam ACTING CHAIRMAN:** It is under education.

**Mr BONSON:** So it is under education?

**Madam ACTING CHAIRMAN:** It is paid for out of the education bucket. Really, it is not this area.

**Mr DUNHAM:** There is a thing called mandatory universal reporting of child abuse, so it does not matter which department feeds them. These neglected children may be coming to the house of Delia Lawrie and being feed porridge over the fence for all I know. All I am saying is the onus is on that person, if they believe that that child is malnourished to the extent that their parents will not or cannot feed them to report that. I do not really care who is feeding them.

What I am saying to you is: if we are feeding hungry children through a departmental program, which might have great benefits getting them to school, I do not know. I am not really worried about the education benefits. What I am asking you, as the minister responsible for child abuse is: are these formal notifications of neglected children?

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** The answer to your question is no.

**Mr DUNHAM:** They are not?

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** The program at school is a completely different issue from the statutory requirements in terms of child protection, member for Drysdale, and you know that. I know that ...

**Mr DUNHAM:** That is not the case.

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** ... you and the opposition are not supportive and do not like the breakfast program because you run this line of welfare-ism and that it is only keeping indigenous families hanging on to welfare pockets and is taking away the responsibilities of families. If we can provide a program that supports and feeds children in the morning before they are going to school, because that morning part is, as I am assuming you will know ...

**Mr DUNHAM:** Why don't you feed all kids? Why aren't we feeding the whole lot of them?

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** Hold on a minute. The morning is the peak time of their learning. In terms of the worsening state of indigenous education, we have known problems in terms of getting children in school and being able to learn on an empty belly. We provide a program that is going to support and to nourish these children. For goodness sake, if you are going to damn us as a government because that is a bad thing, your side ought to hang its head in shame. We are doing something that is providing a bit of respite for these little indigenous children, and it is not taking away the responsibility of parents. In one community in my electorate, there is a program. If you went to that community, parents actually participate in the program. It is not fully funded by government because it is supported by these parents. If you think this is a process of parents not taking responsibility, well then ...

**Mr DUNHAM:** Minister, I will read the definitions of the act:

*For the purpose of this Act the child shall be taken to have suffered maltreatment if ...*



and I will omit some definitions:

*...he has suffered serious emotional or intellectual impairment evidenced by severe psychological or social malfunctioning by commonly accepts standards of the community to which he belongs because of his physical surroundings, nutritional or other deprivation.*

I am asking you whether this program has an element of feeding kids who otherwise would nutritionally deprived and, therefore, neglected.

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** Can I just ...

**Madam ACTING CHAIRMAN:** Minister, sorry. I have ruled this question on the breakfast program out of order. It is not in this output. It is my job as chair to ensure we move through the Estimates process ...

**Mr Dunham:** No, it's not.

**Madam ACTING CHAIRMAN:** according to ...

**Mr DUNHAM:** No it's not. It is your job to maintain order.

**Madam ACTING CHAIRMAN:** I am sorry I have other jobs as part of the Chair, whether you like it or not, member for Drysdale.

**Mr Dunham:** Okay. Well we'll move through as fast as we want to, thank you.

**Madam ACTING CHAIRMAN:** I have ruled on this one, minister. What I am saying is ask another question on Child Protection Services aside from the school breakfast program.

**Mr DUNHAM:** Okay. If you're satisfied that you're not adhering to you act, that is your call as far as I am concerned. Let's go back to Mr Bansemer. I have Mr Bansemer's report here. You said he reviewed Child Protection Services. I have his recommendation here:

*Any departmental restructure should recognise the importance of child protection, the role of the department, the department's clear statutory obligation to protect children at risk, enhancement of the current level of child protection functions is a priority given the current levels of risk in this area.*

That is two years ago. You are saying that you were oblivious to this until Mr Bansemer came along and made that pretty trite recommendation, which wasn't a major reflection on the past, I might add; it is more of a reflection about the future and the priority. That, in your opinion, is a review of Child Protection Services? You called that a review, didn't you?

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** If I can answer the question that was asked, as you know, after the Bansemer Review, the department established, and the former minister made the announcement, the Caring for Children reform. That committee has carriage of taking these steps further. If you wanted some more details provided in terms of that, I might hand over to the Assistant Secretary who has carriage of this division.

**Ms PELTOLA:** There have been a number of initiatives that the department has undertaken to implement the recommendation from Bansemer. I note that you have looked at the external discussion paper or review of the literature that we commissioned from the Child Protection Clearing House. We have produced a discussion paper and an issues paper.

We have consulted with the community and we have been consulting with staff. The Caring for our

Children reform agenda that the Minister spoke of has two aspects: one is the review of the *Community Welfare Act*; the other is the review of practice.

The activities of the committee and of the documents that we produced last year led us to ask government for the additional money, which was forthcoming. There was a framework for the reform of child protection, which was announced at the same time as the additional money and that has a number of principles within it, a key one of which is that one size doesn't fit all. So the reform agenda is about having a range of responses to the different types of abuse and neglect that may come before the department.

Until this point in time, there has been very much a focus on what we called a forensic investigative response. That is going to continue to be an important part of the department's response, but what the review so far has demonstrated, and this is by a range of people both the internal department and external to the department, is we actually need a range of responses. So the parenting strategy, for example, and the Parent Line that have recently been funded are at one end of broad support for families and parents in the community.

There is a range of other supports that we will be funding, such as an expansion of the Parenting Strategy to be more than it currently is and, over time, it will focus on specialised groups; people within the communities who may have particular difficulties in raising their children. So the reform agenda that we are putting in place growing out of Bansemer is about reform across the whole service system so that services to children and families will be at the front end, the more preventative end, and families will be able to seek the assistance they need. In particular this year, we will be looking at more family support and at what we call the hard end of child protection where children are being abused and neglected. We have additional staff and we have already talked about that tonight, and we have a range of strategies to recruit additional staff so that where children are being abused and neglected, we are able to respond and respond quickly.

As well as the one size fits all, I think the other important part of our reform agenda has been the increase in professional support and oversight. The director of the program, Jenny Scott, is a qualified social worker and a very long-term child protection worker. In addition, we are recruiting staff who have particular expertise and are able to offer the support to staff so that we do not have front line staff who are dealing with very difficult and complex cases on their own.

**Mr DUNHAM:** Okay. I have no further questions.

**Madam ACTING CHAIRMAN:** Any questions from other members? That closes consideration of Output 3.3. That closes consideration of Output 3.0, Family and Children Services.

#### **OUTPUT GROUP 4.0 – AGED AND DISABILITY SERVICES**

##### **Output 4.1 – People with a Disability**

**Madam ACTING CHAIRMAN:** We move on to consideration of Output Group 4, Aged and Disability Services, and consideration specifically of Output 4.1, People with a Disability.

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** May I just check that we are finished with that output?

**Madam ACTING CHAIRMAN:** We are finished with Family and Children Services. It is closed off, however I draw your attention to the fact that we have yet to deal with Non-output Specific budget questions. There may be questions arising from that area of which I am unaware.

We have had scenarios where staff have left in other Estimates hearings and questions have popped up, but, yes, ostensibly we have finished, but who knows in this game?

**Ms CARTER:** Minister, this comes from the Aged and Disability area. At the start of this financial year, Aged and Disability were allocated \$45.5m in the budget. There has been an over-spend of \$8.4m.

Can you advise where the extra money was spent?

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** Looking at the figures, I do not know where you derive your figures in terms of an over-spend, member for Port Darwin.

**Ms CARTER:** If you go to the budget for 2003-04 and compare it with the estimated expenditure for 2003-04 ...

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** If I look at 2003-04, the original budget was \$38m; is that the one you are looking at?

**Ms CARTER:** If you go to the previous budget paper at page 196 ...

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** I have had a look at that. There is not an over-spend, but I will defer to the CEO and he can explain to you because it is two budgets, as I understand it.

**Mr GRIEW:** You are looking at the output group combined, making up two outputs, Community Support Services and the second component, which is Support for Senior Territorians and Pensioner Concessions, yes?

**Ms CARTER:** Yes.

**Mr GRIEW:** The changes within 2003-04, and this is consistent with questioning from the health Estimates hearing, are made up of a number of changes, an important one is the back-casting of DCIS previously free services, which is an issue that the Treasurer addressed.

It is also the case that there were some Commonwealth funds carried forward, and with the restructures of the FACS program, as we mentioned earlier. There was some reallocation of costs during the year into this output as we refined the restructure, which was done, if you will recall, between February, when the Bansemer review came down, and June last year. That was done in quite a hurry in terms of that scale of change, and there were a number of refinements made to budgets during the course of this year.

If you want more detail within the output of Community Support Services, some of those changes included: \$4.6m reallocation; \$1.377m of notional DCIS charges; and \$1.2m of Commonwealth funding that had been rolled over.

**Ms CARTER:** Excuse me, if I may, Mr Griew. The \$4.6m reallocation, what does that mean?

**Mr GRIEW:** Both corporate and program-specific costs had been split across a regional structure, and across a funder-purchaser-provider structure, so those had to be pulled together into a Territory-wide program structure, so cost centres had to be both reallocated and split, which is an incredibly technically complex process with over a thousand cost centres in the departments. That work had been done as best we could by 30 June and was refined over the course of this year.

**Ms CARTER:** So, essentially, for the \$8m extra that has gone into Aged and Disability Services, a lot of that \$8m was the moving of funds around, but there was no really tangible different outcome at the end of the year in service provision?

**Mr DUNHAM:** Budget-neutral.

**Ms CARTER:** As my colleague describes it, 'budget-neutral'.

**Mr GRIEW:** Neither is it a blow-out.

**Ms CARTER:** So there are no services in addition to that money; it just got changed around within the department?

**Mr GRIEW:** The carry forward of externally funded projects from 2002-03 to 2003-04 did increase service activity levels, and there was additional revenue into the program last year, post- the signing of the Commonwealth-State-Territory Disability Agreement with a \$600 000 grant we negotiated from the Commonwealth for a program around challenging behaviour.

**Ms CARTER:** But there was no change to outcomes by that movement of \$8.4m?

**Mr GRIEW:** Well, with respect, I guess I just pointed out some areas, some component that was a change, others of it, as you say, were accounting changes.

**Ms CARTER:** Minister, this year there has been I will call it an over-spend of \$8.4m in Aged and Disability. For the next year, you are providing the smallest rate of budget increase to this area of growing need, and the budget difference for this financial year over the last financial is \$788 000. Given that this increase does not cover normal CPI, has this area been under-funded in the new budget or are services to be cut?

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** Services are not going to be cut and you just had it explained to you in quite some detail in terms of budget-neutrality and that there is not any under-spend. I mean, you have repeated what you said at the start. There has not been a budget blow-out. In terms of the detail, I will ask the CEO to go through again to answer your question so that it is clear that we are not cutting programs. There has been the \$1.2m, but Robert, if you can go through it again. I will defer to my CEO.

**Mr GRIEW:** The \$688 000 change between the outcome for 2003-04 and the budget for 2004-05 for the Community Support Services output is the key one you are referring to, I think. That is the nett movement of both increases and a decrease. There is a \$1.2m extra allocation for disability funding as well as a \$651 000 estimate for CPI and wage movements. Therefore, that is a \$1.851m increase in that output.

That is offset by \$1.244m worth of Commonwealth grants that were carried forward into 2003-04 and then ceased. The issue there is about the ceasing of Commonwealth grants, which have time limit activity attached to them being one-off grants. The actual increase in baseline activity funded by the Northern Territory government is \$1.2m plus the \$651 000 allowance for CPI and wage movement.

**Ms CARTER:** Thank you. Minister, on page 140 of Budget Paper No 3, an area looks at performance measures for aged and disability services. It is one of those tables with lots of missing figures in it, but I will not ask for any of those gaps. I note that the number of clients accessing professional support services will almost double from 2400 this year to 4240 next year. Given the small overall increase in the budget of only \$788 000, how can this happen, and will they receive an adequate service? I note that the number of services they are to receive remains constant at 13 200. Can you explain this?

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** I can attempt to explain some of it, but I might ask the Director for Aged and Disability Services to come forward. I stand corrected, but some of that increase is in client numbers, which reflect both better reporting by the department's staff and increased activity in line with budget allocation. We are joined at the table by Kylie Gwynne, Director of Aged and Disability Services.

**Ms GWYNNE:** The increase is, as the minister has said, reflective of improved reporting.

**Ms CARTER:** Right. So, it is getting close to almost double, and the services would stay pretty much stable. Is that what you are saying?

**Mr GRIEW:** The question that I was asking the director is that I am aware that there has been a

national process going on of refining disability service reporting because it is an area that is notoriously less accurate than many other areas, partly because of its largely non-institutional nature. I was just asking the question: is it possible that the effort that has gone in there is part of that national effort, and we do not have the answer to my question. So my question I might have to take on notice.

**Madam ACTING CHAIRMAN:** You could ask yourself later.

**Ms CARTER:** Essentially, what you are saying is that, due to reporting changes and the method of counting things, there will be a significant increase in the figure, even though the service will stay relatively stable over the next 12 months, the level of service?

**Ms GWYNNE:** That is correct.

**Ms CARTER:** Minister, many Territorians working in the Department of Health and Community Services express disquiet over the number of interstate recruits being recruited to senior and middle management in the department. This is having a destabilising effect on the department. For example, could you provide any other explanation as to why all 12 members of the aged and disability program policy staff have left in the last nine months since the appointment of a program head from New South Wales?

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** To answer, I think the program manager from New South Wales was a fantastic recruitment.

**Mr DUNHAM:** And the other 12 are no good, or what?

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** Well, no ...

**Ms CARTER:** They all left.

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** Given that this is an operational issue, I will defer to the CEO.

**Mr GRIEW:** There are a couple of things that ought to be said here. It is not uncommon to turn over an area that has been reasonable stable in the circumstance where you have a new structure and new leadership in the area, especially where there is a reform agenda that is being pursued with the strong backing of senior management.

This accountability falls to me as CEO rather than to the government because the employment decisions made in the department are actually mine and the Public Service Commissioner's. I guess we are guided by the public service legislation in this, which requires us to appoint on the basis of merit. The fact is that the appointment to that position and every other position where we have appointed from interstate has been an appointment made on merit.

**Ms CARTER:** My concern is that 12 people have left from the program. That is what I have been advised. That puts, I would put to you, over a nine month period, a significant hole in your corporate knowledge within Territory staffing.

**Mr GRIEW:** About half of those people were on secondment. What I want to draw out here is what is being said and to reject it utterly as the CEO accountable for appointments of this sort. The appointments are being made on the basis of merit and there is absolutely no indication, as the accountable officer for those appointments, that there is any question but that they are the correct decisions that have been made.

**Ms CARTER:** I wasn't actually implying that that the wrong people were – sorry, that it was anything less than merit. What I was putting to you was that from the feedback that I get around the traps. staff who have been in the department for a long time and are very committed to health in the Northern

Territory are leaving because of the feeling that they get that the senior positions, a lot of them are being taken for people from interstate. This particular program area I think is a disturbing example of it, with 12 people having left in nine months from what is really a small group.

**Mr GRIEW:** There are two points. One is that in the Bansemer Review, the government, the opposition and the newspapers called for a lot of change in this and other areas; and the second is that there are some very specific issues that lie behind the raising of the ageing and disability part of the department, and I am aware of that context, but is an area where change is needed and where change is being led. Sometimes that leads to some staff turning over. It does not mean that those staff did not have commitment, but it may mean they are better placed elsewhere and they may place themselves elsewhere.

**Ms CARTER:** Minister, the new staffing arrangements for the Aged and Disability Program include three more Executive Officer positions. Could you advise what each Executive Officer 1 employment package costs your department?

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** I defer to the CEO.

**Mr GRIEW:** An EO1 employment package is on the record. I am advised that the salary component is in the order of \$80 000 and then, of course, there are on-costs.

**Ms CARTER:** And that would make it approximately \$110 000, would you say, something like that?

**Mr GRIEW:** In that order.

**Ms CARTER:** At a guess. So in the last 12 months, my understanding is that into the structure of the policy area in Aged and Disability has got three EO1 positions at a cost to the department in the vicinity of \$330 000. It seems like a significant increase in staffing in middle management.

**Mr GRIEW:** There is an assumption here that they are all policy positions. I think that is right. In fact, one of them is a policy position and two are operational is my understanding. I would also make the point that one of the points that Bansemer made strongly in his review was the need for clear policy leadership in a number of the programs and the simplification of the management structure. If you want to actually look a comprehensive review of what we have done with those sorts of positions, you need to look at where the positions have been taken out of structures and where they have been put into structures, which is in not exactly nett-neutral, but fairly close. Only one of those is a policy position, as I understand it.

**Ms CARTER:** Moving to another topic, on ABC TV on 3 June, you said after a meeting with the new Disability Advisory Group that you were going to open 10 more beds for people with a disability. Minister, could you explain what you meant by this statement, and in particular, explain what sort of beds are these and where they will be located?

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** When you say 'beds', are you talking about supported accommodation?

**Ms CARTER:** All I got was the TV grab, and you said after the initial meeting with them ...

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** I recall that ABC story, which was in terms of supported accommodation, high support needs. Do you want me to go through some of them?

**Ms CARTER:** Yes.

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** I was saying there will be an additional 10 places to be provided in 2004-05 for people with very high support needs in Darwin, Katherine and Alice Springs. The ABC grab you saw was when I came out of that meeting. There were some concerns at the time that there was a need,

so I was putting to the council what was going to be happening in 2004-05.

**Ms CARTER:** Minister, with regards to those beds, does the costing for them come out of the Aged and Disability budget?

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** Yes.

**Ms CARTER:** Have they been budgeted for this year?

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** Yes.

**Ms CARTER:** Will they run by a non-government organisation?

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** Yes.

**Ms CARTER:** Would they have, for example, a house set up with carers? Is that how it works? How does it work?

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** I will defer to the CEO to give the detail on that.

**Mr GRIEW:** The general presumption with Disability Supported Accommodation Services is that you are trying for a domestic scale and the *Disability Services Act*, which is consistent across all the jurisdictions, states this objective. With people with very high support needs, there is a reality that also has to be taken into account and completely domestic settings, a domestic dwelling, may not be completely appropriate, at least not without substantial modifications, just given the level of need you are talking about. The reality has to be measured against the objective in the design of the premises and that is something that every jurisdiction in Australia is grappling with, and we will, too.

**Ms CARTER:** Do you have to build the premises?

**Mr GRIEW:** We don't know yet.

**Ms CARTER:** Right. You are expecting, though, that those 10 extra beds across the Territory will be available by the end of this coming financial year?

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** Yes.

**Ms CARTER:** In six months time, for example, I could ask you how they are going and get an indication of where they are?

**Mr GRIEW:** Yes, perhaps even more quickly.

**Ms CARTER:** Madam Chair, I have finished with that.

**Madam ACTING CHAIRMAN:** Other members of the committee?

**Dr LIM:** Minister, I ask you to comment on how you feel the Bill Braitling Complex in Alice Springs is going.

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** I'm sorry?

**Dr LIM:** The Bill Braitling Complex, which is support accommodation.

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** The Bill Braitling Complex in Alice Springs?

**Dr LIM:** In Bath Street, Alice Springs. Everyone is screwing their face in confusion. The Bill Braitling Complex ....

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** Is for aged and disability? Is it for ...

**Dr LIM:** It's for support accommodation for most people with disability for people, particularly dual diagnosis people.

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** Would that be under Alcohol and Other Drugs, Madam Acting Chairman?

**Madam ACTING CHAIR:** I am just querying ...

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** Well, depending on what that accommodation ....

**Dr LIM:** People with disabilities is what I am talking about. These are people with disabilities who are living in Alice Springs in supported accommodation in a place called the Bill Braitling Complex in Bath Street.

**Madam ACTING CHAIRMAN:** For clarification, NGO operated?

**Dr LIM:** Yes, NGO operators funded by the Northern Territory government. I think it is Anglicare.

**A member:** Salvation Army.

**Mr DUNHAM:** No, Salvation was doing the Red Shield Hostel. This is the other one.

**Dr LIM:** Anglicare.

**Mr DUNHAM:** I think it is Anglicare SAAP funded service. I do not know.

**Dr LIM:** I think it is.

**Mr GRIEW:** What I have just been told is that the SAAP service for dual diagnosis that we fund is the Salvation Army one. We do not fund another dual diagnosis facility.

**Mr DUNHAM:** And that is at Red Shield?

**Mr GRIEW:** Yes.

**Madam ACTING CHAIRMAN:** It is probably Commonwealth.

**Members** interjecting.

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** We can take that question on notice and give you the information that you require of that.

**Mr GRIEW:** The Bill Braitling Complex is a SAAP-funded service for homeless people, not for dual diagnosis, apparently, and it is SAAP funded.

**Madam ACTING CHAIRMAN:** Homeless. So it does not fall under Aged and Disability Services? No.

**Dr LIM:** Let me describe it this way, Madam Acting Chairman and minister: the Bill Braitling Complex was provided by Territory Housing to Anglicare. They sought funding from the Northern Territory government to provide housing for people who require support accommodation. Many of these



people, in fact, have dual diagnosis problems.

What also happened is, under the previous minister, specific funding was provided for the Red Shield Hostel, which I will ask about shortly, to reconfigure the Red Shield Hostel itself. The Red Shield Hostel, for your information, minister, has 10 beds out of 20 funded by yourself under the SAAP program. My question is: how are these two complexes going, and are there any issues involved with that, and what sort of funding are you providing for them?

**Madam ACTING CHAIRMAN:** All right, for the purpose of this output area, what I have for clarification is that the Red Shield Hostel is funded in part under this output and the minister can appropriately answer that. The other facility is under CDESCA ....

**Mr GRIEW:** No, they are both SAAP.

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** They are both SAAP funded and they should have been put into Output 3.2. They do come under Support Services for Families in Crisis, as I understand it. It should have been appropriately asked, but we can ...

**Dr LIM:** There are no families in there.

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** Well, we can take your questions and we can get back to you, but they should have been put in Output 3.2. They come under that output and we are now on the next output.

**Dr LIM:** Minister, are you prepared to take that question on notice, are you? Are you prepared to take the question on notice?

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** We can take the question on notice.

**Madam ACTING CHAIRMAN:** To assist *Hansard* and to ensure the minister is fully aware of the question, would the member for Greateorex please restate the question?

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### Question on Notice

**Dr LIM:** Minister, could you kindly provide a comprehensive briefing on the Bill Braitling Complex and the Red Shield Hostel in terms of numbers of clients that are being housed at these two complexes, the nature of the funding that is provided, and the quantum of the funding that is provided for those two complexes?

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** That is not a question. You have asked for a briefing.

**Dr LIM:** Well, when I asked the question, you did not know, so ...

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** When you asked the question the first time, it was completely different from what you are saying now, so if you can be more specific and make it a question.

**Dr LIM:** What I said was: could you tell me about the Bill Braitling Complex, and you included the Red Shield Hostel, so I am adding those two. Could you tell me, here you are, delete the word 'briefing' and could you tell me, please?

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** Well, we will respond back to you appropriately if you put the question on notice.

**Dr LIM:** Thank you. Very good.

**Madam ACTING CHAIRMAN:** All right, I will go over this again so everyone is sure of what the question is. Member for Greateorex, would you please restate the question?

**Dr LIM:** Madam Acting Chairman, you are just wasting time and if *Hansard* ...

**Madam ACTING CHAIRMAN:** No, I am not wasting time. Do not challenge me all the time.

**Dr LIM:** Minister, could you kindly provide ...

**Madam ACTING CHAIRMAN:** The minister queried it.

**Dr LIM:** Minister, could you tell me, please ...

**Mr BONSON:** It has been the procedure for three days.

**Dr LIM:** ... in relation to the Bill Braitling Complex and the Red Shield Hostel the nature of the people living there, the quantum of funding that is provided to those two complexes, and any issues in relation to the people living there, in particular, the neighbourhood?

**Madam ACTING CHAIRMAN:** Minister, do you accept that as a question on notice?

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** Yes.

**Madam ACTING CHAIRMAN:** That being the case, I allocate No 9.2 to the question.

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**Madam ACTING CHAIRMAN:** Are there any further questions in relation to people with a disability? That being the case, that concludes Output 4.1.

#### **Output 4.2 – Support for Senior Territorians and Pensioner Concessions**

**Ms CARTER:** This is a question that I have submitted, probably in a bundle, to the Minister for Health, so I do not know whether you actually received it from him.

**Madam ACTING CHAIRMAN:** We have had more people move in and out of the room since I made the announcement earlier on. I have been requested to remind people to turn mobile phones off, not to 'silent'. Evidently, we have two mobile phones interfering with the recording equipment, so I seek your indulgence in that matter. I am sorry about the interruption, shadow minister.

**Ms CARTER:** That is all right. Minister, you may have received this request from me via the Health Minister because I suspect it got bundled up in the group of questions I sent him. In October last year, I submitted a Question on Notice to your predecessor, which currently sits on the Notice Paper. It remains unanswered and I request that it be answered. The question is: what was the bed occupancy rate per day as a percentage on Cowdy Ward from 1 July 2003 to 31 August 2003?

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** You are in the wrong output.

**Ms CARTER:** Oh, my apologies.

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** We are on Senior Territorians. But when we get to mental health, we will certainly ...

**Ms CARTER:** I just looked up and thought it is the same people.

**Members** interjecting.

**Ms CARTER:** No, I have no questions on that.

**Madam ACTING CHAIRMAN:** Member for Drysdale, you indicated you have a question.

**Mr DUNHAM:** The Seniors Card is still produced in your department and distributed and all that?

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** Chief Minister's.

**Mr DUNHAM:** The Chief Minister's Department has it. So any budget appropriation and any operational issues related to it will be with the Chief Minister?

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** That is right.

**Madam ACTING CHAIRMAN:** Any further questions? That concludes consideration of Output 4.2, Support for Senior Territorians, and it concludes consideration of Output Group 4.0, Aged and Disability Services.

### **OUTPUT GROUP 5.0 – Mental Health Services**

#### **Output 5.1 – Mental Health Services**

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** Before we start, might I introduce Cheryl Furner, the Director of Mental Health Services..

**Ms CARTER:** Now, where was I? Last year, I submitted, after our Estimates process, a Question on Notice to your predecessor and it still has not been answered. I request that it is answered. The question is: what was the bed occupancy rate as a percentage on Cowdy Ward from 1 July 2003 to 31 August 2003? So really, during the month of July last year, what was the bed occupancy rate on Cowdy Ward?

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** I will go through two different ones, because from 1 July to 31 July was 96 per cent. Then, from 1 August to 31 August was up to 102 per cent.

**Ms CARTER:** Minister, it has been in the paper, and it was raised when I met with TEAM recently, that Cowdy Ward is significantly overcrowded. What would be your comment or views on that?

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** Before I defer to the director, what I would like to add is the statistics from 1 May to 31 May 2004. When you look at the numbers that I gave you up to 31 August, it was as 102. From 1 May to 31 May, up to that time, there has been a decrease down to 83 per cent, but I will defer to the CEO.

**Mr GRIEW:** If I could just make a quick comment first and then get more detail from the director, both the Bansemer report and the Stuart Riley report that followed into mental health services in the Northern Territory made a couple of points about our mental health service. One is that we have both a high occupancy rate of our acute service but also a long length of stay and a high cost attached to stays there. Also, our community service needed development.

There is not any question but that Cowdy has been crowded at various points, but it is also the case that a reform process is needed for mental health services here that includes boosting up community and sub-acute services as well as just looking at Cowdy by itself. That is one of the things that has driven both the work of management in that service and the allocation of the extra money that has become available to the service of the last year particularly. I will hand over the Cheryl Furner, the director, to say a bit more about that.

**Ms FURNER:** There have been a number of changes and actions that have been implemented to try to better manage the occupancy rate in the inpatient unit. That includes reviewing discharge and admission policies. We have put in place a couple of new positions including a discharge planner in the inpatient unit to facilitate better discharging. We have looked at occupational health and safety issues and created a casual nurse bank to increase the capacity of our service to employ staff in line with occupational health and safety best practice guidelines.

We have also restructured our extended hours service and put in place a consultation liaison position in the emergency department. So we are looking at those entry and exit points, trying to relieve the pressure on the service. As the CEO indicated, we are also investing some of the new money into sub-acute care, step up-step down, services. That is also designed to take some pressure off the inpatient unit so that occupancy rates have actually not continued to increase over the past 12 months.

**Ms CARTER:** Thank you. Minister, the Northern Territory Mental Health Strategy report released in February 2003 commented on page 49 that the mental health unit at Alice Springs Hospital has a design problem in that the door cannot be kept locked to keep the non-voluntary patients in. Has that problem been fixed?

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** In October last year, that door was fixed. I know that this question came up yesterday and we are answering that today. The lock has been fixed. It was fixed in October 2003.

**Ms CARTER:** Great. Minister, in December last year, the President of the Mental Health Review Tribunal, Chief Magistrate Hugh Bradley, provided the annual report of the tribunal. The tribunal was set up a number of years ago to do a number of things, including to periodically review the admission and treatment of both voluntary and involuntary patients to our mental health services. The annual report raised a number of important issues and I would appreciate it if you could comment on these. First of all, the report says and I quote:

*The tribunal notes that the review of the Mental Health and Related Services Act seems to have stalled.*

Can you comment?

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** We are collating the responses and there are ongoing discussions with them.

**Ms CARTER:** So do you have any concerns there in that you have someone of the calibre of Mr Hugh Bradley making the comment in this annual report that the process to him and to the tribunal appears to have stalled? That comment was made in a publication last December.

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** CEO.

**Mr GRIEW:** The answer to that might be that the major discussion paper for that review was released early this year.

**Ms CARTER:** Right. When would you expect the draft bill to be presented to parliament, given that a review of the act is occurring?

**Ms PELTOLA:** It is a focussed review rather than a review of the entire act. The documentation has been on our web site, the program of collating the responses to the discussion paper should be ready for presentation within the next month or two. Our project officer has been unwell, but it is a matter of weeks not months.

**Ms FURNER:** The feedback to stakeholders and some further discussion around several areas that

were raised in the issues paper will occur over the next couple of months and we are expecting the draft amendments will be discussed with the minister following those further consultations and it will depend on the work program of parliamentary counsel as to when the draft amendments are presented to the House.

**Ms CARTER:** Minister, would you have any idea when you would expect those amendments to come before the Assembly?

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** I cannot give you a time. Once that goes to parliamentary counsel, as you would know, for drafting, I have no control over it.

**Ms CARTER:** So within the next financial year?

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** Yes.

**Ms CARTER:** Another comment from the Mental Health Review Tribunal's annual report was that people with predominantly organic brain disorders and/or intellectual disabilities are being detained under the *Mental Health and Related Services Act* for lack of appropriate legislation, services and accommodation to meet their particular needs.

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** CEO.

**Mr GRIEW:** I can make a brief comment. That, again, is not an issue that is unique to this jurisdiction and yet there are some reasons why more organic brain damage presents here and will present here over the next 10 years or so or more.

It is the case that this comes up as a problem for us and there are a number of things happening including a review with the Department of Justice of substituted decision making, for example, and of guardianship provisions. There is also a senior working group that I set up within the department to make sure that all of our services have the best understanding possible of the law as it currently exists across the different services.

**Ms CARTER:** That touches on my third point, which was about the *Guardianship Act*. There are obviously quite a number of things that are currently under review within the scope of mental health.

**Mr GRIEW:** And disability.

**Ms CARTER:** And disability. Minister, last week, the coronial findings with regards to the death of a 25-year-old male were made available to members of the Assembly. It concerned a young Darwin man who hanged himself and his mother found him. I guess some of your staff may recall the case. One of the recommendations by the Coroner was for a step-down facility. Your CEO responded to this recommendation in a letter to the Coroner dated 12 May saying:

*Additional funding has been provided to the mental health program during 2003-04 to be invested in clinical and support services, including enhanced clinical care, subacute care options or step-down models.*

Minister, can you advise how that money has been spent providing a step-down model, which I assume is providing a safe haven for patients discharged from the hospital setting? Where is it and how does it operate?

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** Before I defer to the CEO, there was funding of \$1m that was allocated in the 2004-05 Budget to establish, as you said, subacute step-up step-down services which will include clinical care provided by specialist mental health services and non-clinical support provided by the non-government sector. I will defer to the CEO as to where we are up to with that, but that is for 2004-

05.

**Mr GRIEW:** I am presuming this was a letter that I signed on 12 May?

**Ms CARTER:** That is the one.

**Mr GRIEW:** Of this year?

**Ms CARTER:** Yes.

**Mr GRIEW:** I do not have that letter here, but the briefing I have suggests the funding was allocated in the 2004-05 year.

**Ms CARTER:** Right. I have the letter here. It says quite plainly that during the 2003-04 year, to be invested in clinical and support services, blah blah blah, but what you are saying to me is that money is coming in the new budget, and that at this point in time, the step-down service does not exist? Is that what you are saying?

**Mr GRIEW:** Yes, and the financial year is almost over.

**Ms CARTER:** So, currently there is no step-down facility?

**Mr GRIEW:** What the director has just advised me is that we have actually almost finished some quite detailed costings for flexible individual care packages, which means that we are almost ready to implement the initial phases of such a service. This is not a kind of stand-alone facility; this is a service.

**Ms CARTER:** Could you describe how you would see that service?

**Ms FURNER:** The program has engaged in considerable consultation with stakeholders, non-government and other community stakeholders, as well as our internal staff, around models, and we have received advice from steering committees, both in the Top End and Central Australia, about appropriate models for sub-acute care that will deliver flexible individualised support to be trialled over the next 18 months.

There is provision at this particular point in time because we need to get the services established to focus primarily initially on individual care packages for both remote and urban areas. In future, we will look where there are opportunities and it seems appropriate to look at the viability of a small residential-type facility, perhaps in Darwin. In places like Central Australia, it may be that that type of facility is not viable or appropriate, that they prefer a more flexible approach so it will provide a more intensive level of support for a limited period of time up to approximately eight weeks. That is the type of approach that is taken in other jurisdictions that will prevent admissions, and allow some earlier discharge for people who do not need that more intensive acute level of support.

**Ms CARTER:** So what you are saying is rather than a stand-alone facility, say a cottage or a house with a 24 hour carer in the house, it could be that a person would be discharged home perhaps to the care, for example, of his parents, and then you would have an outreach worker go and visit once a day? Is that the sort of thing that you might be talking about?

**Ms FURNER:** No, actually much more intensive support than that.

**Ms CARTER:** In what way would it be more intensive, or could it be?

**Ms FURNER:** It could be flexible. It might be that a support worker is spending quite a number of hours with that person. The capacity to be flexible, I think, is an important point, but noting that it is

intended to be more intensive than the current services available.

**Mr GRIEW:** Can I just clarify that it is the concept of sub-acute care here is to get people who otherwise are not going to get out of an inpatient facility out. We are talking about quite a high level of need, still. We are not talking about going home and having a bit of a visit. We are talking about people who need quite substantial support as they make that transition.

**Ms CARTER:** Minister, have specialist child and youth mental health care services been augmented during this financial year?

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** I might defer to the director to give you the details on that, but, yes.

**Ms CARTER:** If they have, could you describe how?

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** I defer to the director.

**Ms FURNER:** An additional child and youth mental health position has been established in Central Australia. An additional child psychiatrist position has been established in the Top End.

**Ms CARTER:** Before you go further, has that position been filled?

**Ms FURNER:** Yes, it has. In fact, the person in the position has been there for some months. We have also recruited an NT-wide child psychiatrist, and that recruitment took place last year. That position will have a strategic territory-wide role.

**Ms CARTER:** Minister, what happens to the people aged, say, 14 to 18 years who display signs and symptoms of mental health problems? If they need to be hospitalised, what happens, given that Cowdy Ward in Darwin is very reluctant to take young clients?

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** I defer again to the director.

**Ms FURNER:** Decisions about what type, level and location of care that young people need needs to be made, obviously, on a case-by-case basis. A multidisciplinary team including doctors, nurses and allied health staff talk with the young person and, obviously, their support people and family, whoever is appropriate, in terms of looking at what type and location of care is appropriate. In some instances, and this is something that does happen in other jurisdictions as well, where there are small populations and limited capacity to provide highly specialised tertiary level care, young people in the age group that you have referred to are cared for in adult inpatient units or inpatient units that are primarily designed for adult patients with a nurse special, that is one-on-one care, to ensure that their safety and wellbeing are protected.

In other instances, and this occurs in Royal Darwin, young people are located in other hospital wards so that the capacity to be flexible is maintained where you do not have a high enough demand for permanently established, highly specialised beds. In some instances, we do have young people cared for interstate in tertiary level specialised adolescent units, for example.

**Ms CARTER:** Minister, this particular issue was raised with me when I was approached by a lady named Mrs Vicky McClelland. It did, unfortunately, end up in the paper in February of this year. I will quote from the article:

*Vicky McClelland of Durack fears for her 15 year-old daughter's welfare after being repeatedly turned away from medical treatment. Her daughter, Samantha, is thought to be schizophrenic. She's living on the streets because she is 'too violent and disruptive to others'.*

In the end, I gather the family have left the Northern Territory because of the difficulty they had with

their daughter and the management of her. According to the article and certainly according to Mrs McClelland, with whom I spoke, when they took their daughter to the Tamarind Centre, the daughter kept walking out and wouldn't deal with the staff there because the daughter didn't recognise that she had a mental health problem. Then the family was told that Cowdy Ward would be very reluctant to take her because although she was physically as big as I am, she was 15 years old and to put her on Cowdy Ward would be a problem.

Is there any move afoot to create some sort of an annexe or something to keep young people, given that there is probably a rising incidence of mental health problems in the community?

**Mr GRIEW:** There is a temptation with a number of these sorts of programs to create accommodation or institutional-based care for young people. There isn't a bar on Cowdy Ward taking young people; it just strongly wouldn't be the professional's preference to provide care that way. You will find the same with drug and alcohol services and a number of other services where there are so many risks and down sides for putting such a young person into an essentially adult environment of that sort. The strong preference of professionals in most of those programs will be instead to provide comprehensive packaged care, which involves home placement or a home environment placement with possibly very intensive personal care and medical support.

Where a young person is as violent as this, then that is going to stretch us in a jurisdiction of this size as it would stretch even a big jurisdiction, and it is possible that a patient of that sort could be placed, but without knowing the details of the case, it is impossible to make a comment.

**Ms CARTER:** The gist behind this story was that the girl was so violent to her family that she couldn't stay in the house. She ended up living on the streets. I think at the time I spoke to them, they thought she was pregnant at 15. So it is a very, obviously, sad situation and it just flagged to me the situation that we have because they are caught between a very young person perhaps on a children's ward and an adult that it almost feels like it's in the too hard basket. I won't labour the point, but just raise it and thank you for your comments.

Minister, we all agree that mental health services is an area of increased need in our community. The Martin Labor government claims that it is open, accountable and transparent in its dealing with Territorians. Last year, I was provided, under Freedom of Information legislation, with documents related to the health aspects of the Estimates hearing for last year, 2002-03. Page 30 from Folder 1 demonstrates a cut to the planned spending by the department of \$536 000 from the mental health program, but the details are blacked out. I am happy to table a copy of that.

Minister, can you tell Territorians what activities or activity was not provided and why? If you add up the sums on this page, you can work out quite easily that \$536 000 last year, as in 2002-03, was cut from spending. Can you tell us what was cancelled?

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** I will have to take it on notice. I don't have that information here.

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#### Question on Notice

**Madam ACTING CHAIRMAN:** To assist *Hansard* and to ensure the minister is fully aware of the question, I would ask the Shadow Minister to please restate the question.

**Ms CARTER:** On page 33 of Folder 1 of the information I was provided with under FOI by your department and relating to the output group Mental Health Services, the variation is blacked out for the 2002-03 Estimate to the 2003-04 Budget, totalling \$536 000. Could you detail what was cut from that planned spending?

**Madam Deputy CHAIR:** Minister. do you accept that as a question taken on notice?

**Mr GRIEW:** There is just a technical issue here.



**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** We are just trying to clarify ...

**Ms CARTER:** You can have that copy.

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** Hold on. We are just trying clarify what you are ...

**Madam ACTING CHAIRMAN:** How about we wait until the tabled paper arrives?

**Mr GRIEW:** The information was blacked out under the *Information Act*, so there is a question about ...

**Ms CARTER:** No, I am not talking about the phone number.

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** No, you have two lots of bars there, and that was blacked out under the *Information Act* when you accessed that information, and that is for a purpose.

**Mr GRIEW:** To make the judgment about whether we can provide the information requires two things: both the part of the documentation that gives the reason why it was blacked out, which will be in that folder at the front, I imagine, therefore to know what it the reason for it having been withheld; and second to understand better the interaction of this questioning process and the *Information Act* process, which I could not claim to understand at this hour.

**Ms CARTER:** I accept that you will have that deliberation, but all I would be saying is that it is quite obvious, because you have figures here and totals here, that you can work out, with a calculator, in my case, how much it is, and I would just like to know what was blacked out in there. It is a description of a program activity and it is obviously quite significant because it is worth over \$0.5m.

**Madam ACTING CHAIRMAN:** I am going to seek clarification as to whether or not the minister accepts that as a question.

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** We are not taking it on notice because we need to get clarification in terms of why that was blacked out.

**Madam ACTING CHAIRMAN:** So it is not a Question of Notice.

**Ms CARTER:** Can I do another one then? Minister could you, on notice, advise me whether or not you can provide the information?

**Madam ACTING CHAIRMAN:** Minister, do you accept that question on notice?

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** Yes, I do.

**Madam ACTING CHAIRMAN:** That being the case, I allocate number 9.3 to the question.

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**Ms CARTER:** Minister, you will understand well that many Aboriginal men are reluctant to communicate their troubles to female health staff. Given that situation, why doesn't the department create and fund a male Aboriginal mental health worker position to cover the urban and outlying areas of Katherine, providing a service to communities like Barunga, Beswick, Bulman and Timber Creek?

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** I totally agree. It is a huge issue in the mental health area in terms of indigenous men, and indigenous people across the board. You did raise specifically the issue in terms of

indigenous men. There were four Aboriginal mental health workers recruited. In terms of gender, I defer to the CEO.

**Mr GRIEW:** My understanding is one of those positions was in that area, and I do not know if we know the gender of that worker, but they are going to be one or the other.

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** Can I just add that there is a male indigenous mental health worker that is in the Katherine region, not working in the department but in a non-government organisation that is moving across the region.

**Mr GRIEW:** That is in the Top End Division of General Practice, so that covers part.

**Ms CARTER:** It has been put to me, though, that in the Katherine area it would certainly be welcomed if we had departmental male Aboriginal health worker to cover specifically Katherine and those communities, given that the one working with the Top End Division may not be available to do general departmental work.

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** There was a specific male Aboriginal health worker who was in the department in Katherine, but then chose to go and work in a non-government organisation to be, I suppose, broadly across the region but, hopefully, we will recruit back to that position.

**Ms CARTER:** So currently, is there a position vacant in the Katherine District in Aboriginal Mental Health?

**Mr GRIEW:** No. There is not a vacant position. Our workers work with the position in the Top End Division of General Practice that the minister was describing.

**Ms CARTER:** Minister, can you advise how many Aboriginal Mental Health Worker positions are in the department?

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** It is about 14, but we are just checking the exact number for you. There are currently 13 Aboriginal Mental Health Workers employed by the department; nine in the Top End and four in Central Australia. In addition, the Division of General Practice runs a number of Aboriginal Mental Health Workers to work alongside general practitioners, visiting specialists and Mental Health staff.

**Ms CARTER:** With regard to the 13 positions across the department in the Territory, how many are currently filled?

**Ms FURNER:** In the Top End, we have eight of the nine positions are filled and one being recruited to.

**Mr GRIEW:** That is in the Top End, and in Central Australia there are another four. We do not know that? We will take it on notice.

**Ms FURNER:** Take it on notice.

**Madam ACTING CHAIRMAN:** Okay, to assist *Hansard* and the ensure minister is fully aware of the question, would the Shadow Minister please repeat the question?

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#### Question on Notice

**Ms CARTER:** Minister, could you advise how many of the four Aboriginal Mental Health Worker positions located in Central Australia are currently filled?

**Madam ACTING CHAIRMAN:** Minister, do you accept that as a question taken on notice?

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** Yes.

**Madam ACTING CHAIRMAN:** That being the case, I allocate number 9.4 to the question.

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**Ms CARTER:** Thank you. Minister, you would be aware that our acute hospitals are currently housing people with long-term mental health problems, such as psychogeriatric conditions like dementia, and young demented people with conditions caused by drug abuse, such as alcohol and petrol sniffing. I understand that on average, for example, at Royal Darwin Hospital, 10 to 15 beds a day are taken up with such cases. Minister, are there any plans to develop a long-term residential place for people with long-term mental health problems?

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** I defer to the CEO.

**Mr GRIEW:** There is a distinction here, which sometimes sounds pedantic but is important in terms of the provision of care between long-term organic brain conditions and mental illnesses, and many of the conditions you have cited would not normally be accepted by the Mental Health Service as being mental illnesses, and the difference, therefore, in mode of treatment is quite important.

Psychogeriatric illness is the day-to-day bread and butter of nursing homes, and we are going to have to confront the issue of long-term brain damage from petrol sniffing in larger numbers here than elsewhere, although whether the response to that is most appropriately an institutional care environment or more your disability service sort of construct, with a variety of accommodation and support services or a combination of accommodation and support services, is the question. Our tendency would be towards the latter.

**Ms CARTER:** At this point in time, at no doubt at incredible expense, they are housed in Royal Darwin Hospital. Is there any feeling of the need to get on to this quickly?

**Mr GRIEW:** The number of aged people housed long-term in Royal Darwin Hospital as a proportion of both the aged population and the beds in Royal Darwin Hospital is probably lower than in other states. The issue of bed-lock from nursing home-type patients is not as acute here and the number of nursing home beds and aged care options here continues to grow, so there is just not the same log jam that there is other states. It does not mean it is not an issue, but it is not the same kind of issue that it is in some of the other places. We probably have more of an issue with those younger people, where an institutional care environment is probably not appropriate. We are, as the minister described earlier, developing more supported accommodation options, which are more appropriate for that group.

Certainly, in Katherine Hospital, we have had an issue, at one point, with four long-term patients with disabilities, and have been looking at collaborative arrangements with aged and disability providers around providing options for those people, which would be a substantial relief, both to the hospital and to those people and their families. The supported accommodation area is the main game here rather than building another institution.

**Madam ACTING CHAIRMAN:** No further questions on Mental Health Services from the shadow? Other members of the committee? No? That concludes Output Group 5.0 and Output 5.1.

In discussion with the Shadow Minister and, bearing in mind that we have been going since 6.30 pm without relief, I propose that the Estimates Committee breaks for five minutes or thereabouts. We will be back at 9.15 pm and I will add that five minutes on to the end of the session. At this stage, we are scheduled to finish at 11.05 pm.

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The committee suspended.

**OUTPUT GROUP 6 – Public Health Services**  
**Output 6.3 – Alcohol and Other Drugs.**

**Madam ACTING CHAIRMAN:** Shadow Minister, do you have any questions?

**Ms CARTER:** Yes, thank you. Minister, the last Department of Health and Community Services annual report covering 2002-03 claims that the Alcohol and Other Drugs program under-spent, and it is their word on page 137, because of, and I quote: 'lower than expected corporate services costs'.

The extent of the under-spend was \$15.8m budget minus \$14m actual expense, totalling a difference of \$1.8m or 11 per cent of the Alcohol and Other Drugs budget not being spent. Why was such a significant amount of money not spent last year in this important area?

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** We may have to take that on notice because she is referring back to 2002-03 and we do not have that information, but we can take that on notice.

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**Question on Notice**

**Madam ACTING CHAIRMAN:** To assist *Hansard* and to ensure the minister is fully aware of the question, would the Shadow Minister please restate the question?

**Ms CARTER:** Minister, with regards to the 2002-03 Annual Report for the Department of Health and Community Services, page 137 explains that there was a variation in the cost of spending in the program Alcohol and Other Drugs of \$1.8m. Minister, can you advise why that happened?

**Madam ACTING CHAIRMAN:** Minister, do you accept that as a question taken on notice?

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** Yes.

**Madam ACTING CHAIRMAN:** That being the case, I allocate number 9.5 to the question.

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**Ms CARTER:** Minister, I am sure you would agree that the Alcohol and Other Drugs program exists to try to address what is arguably the greatest health problem facing Territorians. Given the importance of this unit, why have there been seven directors or section heads of this unit during the past nine months?

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** In relation to the staff, I will defer to the CEO, but in terms of *Building Healthier Communities* and our Labor government's commitment in relation to this issue, one of the key priority areas is tackling substance abuse and that is something we are quite serious about. In terms of the turnover of staff, I will defer to the CEO.

**Mr GRIEW:** I am not sure that there have been seven.

**Ms CARTER:** I can list them: Cheryl Furner, Ali McClay, Gloria Markey, Di Rason, Damien Connelly, Deidre Logie and now we have Nick Gill as acting.

**Mr GRIEW:** A number of those would have been very short-term acting and one refers to the previous structure – in fact, maybe two of those relate to the previous structure – which was not the same unit.

**Ms CARTER:** But all within the last nine months, we have had seven people.

**Mr GRIEW:** Not all. There would not be all of them in the last nine months. Some of that goes back to the previous financial year to 2002-03.

**Ms CARTER:** All right, well it is seven in the last 12 months.

**Mr GRIEW:** Possibly.

**Ms CARTER:** Whatever. It is still a significant unstable head of that area.

**Mr GRIEW:** This is related to the earlier question, in fact, and several of those names mentioned are people who have acted on a short-term basis. An unsuccessful applicant for another job, which relates to the previous questioning, was transferred into that position. That person has now left the service, which is why we have had someone else acting while we advertise the job.

**Ms CARTER:** I put it to you, minister, that in the last 12 months, if you look at some of those people who have been and gone, we have had a loss of approximately 70 years of corporate knowledge from this important program area. Some of those people were involved with very successful programs, like the *Living with Alcohol* program and had very significant corporate knowledge. Is it a concern of yours that during this relatively short period of time, we have had such a significant number of people heading the Alcohol and Other Drugs program?

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** You mentioned Cheryl Furner and Ali Mackay and others. Cheryl Furner is still in the system, I mean, she is now Director of the Mental Health Unit, and I think if you look at some of the issues and the contribution that she can make, that corporate knowledge is still within the system. I think the explanation that was provided answered your question.

**Ms CARTER:** So, are you hopeful that with the appointment of a new person that there will be a settling down within this area?

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** I think so, and I think the Acting Director who has come into this area comes with broad skill and expertise from outside in the community sector, and I think sometimes we have to be able to bring that knowledge that has also been built and nurtured out in the community sector. It is certainly a great thing to have that come into the department to be able to add to the existing skills and expertise.

**Ms CARTER:** One of my concerns linked to that previous question was that \$1.8m was not spent by the program, or 11 per cent of the budget. From my experience in working in the department, if you do not have people in those sorts of positions, it is often hard to get the money spent and out there, for example, to non-government organisations. Do you think that the unstable situation within management led to the fact that 11 per cent of the budget was not spent?

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** The under-spend, as I understand, you are talking about in 2002-03, which would have come in to 2003-04.

**Mr GRIEW:** In fact, during the period you are referring to with less stability among the directorial staffing, the program spending, the period you are talking about is the period prior to that when there was stability.

**Ms CARTER:** Still within that area, a few months ago, the head of the Alcohol and Other Drugs program was suspended on paid leave. For how long was he suspended on paid leave?

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** In answer to the shadow, I will defer to the CEO.

**Mr GRIEW:** That officer is no longer with the department. He was a contract officer and, by mutual

agreement, that contract was ended. I would resist answering questions that go to the details of an individual case in these sorts of areas. It is not uncommon in an agency of this size and complexity for a senior contract to be ended by mutual agreement, and a small number have been ended in that way. If I go down the path of answering questions about individual cases, personal matters, in this place then I would be both breaching confidentiality agreements with individuals and starting to get into areas that are unfortunate for individuals.

**Ms CARTER:** I can assure you I have no intention of going into the person's identity or the reasons why this has happened, and I am not actually familiar with some of that information myself, but given that we are examining the budget and costings and expenditure in the area, could you advise how much money was paid out to this person? My understanding is that he was on, as you described yourself, a senior contract, and that he was 12 months into a four-year contract, and that the payout has been significant.

**Mr GRIEW:** First, I think his identity is known to many people in this room just by the questioning so far, so I do not think it is possible for us to have this discussion without the identity being known at this point ...

**Madam ACTING CHAIRMAN:** Yes, I have already guessed who it is.

**Mr GRIEW:** ... as I think has been clear since the earlier questioning. The second point I make is that we are guided in negotiations where contracts end by the Public Service Commissioner's Office and in no case would an amount exceeding contractual provisions be allowed for, and under Northern Territory executive office contracts, that does not involve the full pay-out of contracts.

**Ms CARTER:** My understanding is that you can pay up to 12 months of the contract and negotiate higher. Would you concede that that happened?

**Mr GRIEW:** In no case.

**Ms CARTER:** Sorry, what was the no case related to?

**Mr GRIEW:** In no case has that happened.

**Ms CARTER:** Right. I guess all I would say then is that it is unfortunate that the situation did come to this. Obviously, the pay-out to this person is going to come out of the Alcohol and Other Drugs program.

**Mr GRIEW:** Well, can I make a statement about that? It may or may not be unfortunate. This is actually a personnel staffing issue involving negotiations with individual contract officers and there are a range of personal issues that can lie behind these things.

**Ms CARTER:** Minister, what services is the Pain Clinic located at Royal Darwin Hospital providing?

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** In answering your question, and so that you get the right answer to the question, I would like to ask Dr Tarun Weeramanthri to join the table and answer your question.

**Dr WEERAMANTHRI:** There are a number of components of the service. The first service is the service provided by the Rehabilitation Unit, which has a number of specialists, one of whom has particular training in pain management. He provides an initial assessment service on referral from general practitioners and others. In addition, there are two visiting pain specialists who come from Adelaide who also provide intermittent visits or regular visits on an alternate basis to Darwin and Alice Springs.

**Ms CARTER:** My understanding, minister, was that the clinic was designed to be a multi-disciplinary

service. Is there still a significant component of a multi-disciplinary service at the clinic, or has it reverted primarily to a medical service concentrating mainly on the prescription of buprenorphine?

**Dr WEERAMANTHRI:** I would just like to make a distinction there between the opioid pharmacotherapy program, which prescribes both methadone and buprenorphine, which is separate from what I previously described. That is for people with established dependence on opioids. There is an overlap, or there may be an overlap, between patients who have opioid dependent issues and pain issues. Some have one or the other, and some have both. The opioid pharmacotherapy program is multi-disciplinary and does have a psychologist as well as medical practitioners employed. The Rehabilitation Unit, which I previously described, which provides an initial pain assessment prior to referral to the interstate specialists, does have multi-disciplinary personnel, but they are not primarily utilised for the assessment of those patients. They are more utilised for the day-to-day running of the rehabilitation service.

**Ms CARTER:** Minister, a review was done, I gather, of the Pain Clinic in recent years. What was the outcome of that review?

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** I defer to Dr Weeramanthri.

**Dr WEERAMANTHRI:** There was the report of the Illicit Drugs Task Force; I am not sure if that is what you are referring to. One of the recommendations out of that review was, first, for the establishment of the opiate pharmacotherapy program, which we described, which was established in 2002, and second, that options for development of multi-disciplinary pain service be explored. That Illicit Drugs Task Force reported after a period in which there had been a trial of multi-disciplinary pain service. I think that was around 2001-02, somewhere around that time. Subsequent to that, we have seen how many people have been taken up, if you like, by the opiate pharmacotherapy program and to see whether there was a residual need and the numbers that would be required in terms of a straight pain service, if you like, having established the opiate pharmacotherapy program.

Currently, we are looking within the department at those numbers, and it is 18 months now since the opiate pharmacotherapy program was established, and we are looking at the service options in terms of further developing options for people with chronic pain. That is an active review process within the department. I am not sure if there has been any other review process in terms of pain service, but we are currently doing an internal one.

**Ms CARTER:** With regards to the internal review that is occurring, when would you expect it to be completed?

**Mr GRIEW:** Dr Weeramanthri is leading a project for us doing this work across a number of programs and services in collaboration with the AMA and service providers from a number of sectors. The aim of that is to start to build the service. Sometimes when we talk review, we mean looking internally at the work we do and improving it. Sometimes we capitalise it and we expect a little book or a publication. This is more the former case.

**Ms CARTER:** Any idea when that would be completed?

**Dr WEERAMANTHRI:** We have developed a draft discussion paper. We have shown it to stakeholders. We are in the process of getting to a couple of favoured options about service development and getting some more detailed costings around that. It is still within the department and hasn't yet gone further than that.

**Ms CARTER:** I see, thank you. Minister, in Budget Paper No 3 on page 143 in the area of Alcohol and Other Drugs, it shows as a quality measure that a higher proportion of clients attending non-government organisation alcohol and other drug services reach what they call a valid date of cessation in their treatment program compared with government organisations. NGOs achieve a 60 per cent rating as opposed to government services of 50 per cent. Can you advise why there is such a difference in this quality measurement between the two types? Is the department falling short on

what it could achieve and, if so, why?

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** As I understand ...

**Ms CARTER:** The page is 145.

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** This is a new measure as I understand, but I will defer to the Acting Director of Alcohol and Other Drugs.

**Mr GILL:** The difference is quite simply accounted for. When we refer to the Alcohol and Other Drug program's treatments services, we are referring simply to the clinical services. The Alcohol and Other Drugs program does not provide rehabilitation services, counselling services, and so on. The program provides focussed clinical treatment services for the more complex client needs. In effect, the program sees its role as providing the sorts of specialist services that cannot successfully be provided by the non-government sector. One way of describing that might be to say: 'We get the too hard basket'. So we would in fact expect more completions of services in those clients referred to the non-government sector.

**Ms CARTER:** Thank you for that. Minister, the report from the Task Force on Illicit Drugs was released nearly two and a half years ago. The report made a number of quality recommendations. What are the main ones that have been implemented?

**Mr Dunham:** Good question.

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** That is a good question and if you wait, we will provide the answer.

**Mr Dunham:** I was talking to my colleague, actually.

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** Okay. He is just referring to his colleague.

**Mr GILL:** The four principal recommendations from the illicit drug task force were committed to by government immediately on receipt of the task force recommendations. These were the establishment of pharmacotherapies, buprenorphine and methadone, for dependent opioid users; the provision of an accessible and appropriate Alcohol and Other Drugs information service for adults across the Territory; the provision of specialist assistance and advice for doctors and other professionals in the Alcohol and Other Drugs area; and a project to map the capacity and evaluate the needs and responses of treatment services across the Territory.

Of those three recommendations, ADIS, that is the Alcohol and Drug Information Service, a telephone service, is now available 24 hours a day, and is used by Territorians of all sorts. The Drug and Alcohol Clinical Assistance Service, the DACAS telephone line, is also available and is being used by practitioners in Alice Springs, Darwin rural and Tennant Creek areas. Pharmacotherapies have been provided for the last 18 months and are provided in Alice Springs and in Darwin. The first phase of the mapping project will be completed by the end of this month and the second phase, which is the evaluation process, will be tendered out and we confidently expect its completion by the end of this year. Other recommendations of the task force are being evaluated and slowly actioned as they become priorities within the Alcohol and Other Drugs program's overall operation.

**Ms CARTER:** Minister, could you advise in new financial year, are there any recommendations that you are particularly expecting to be able to implement?

**Mr GILL:** The other major recommendation that will take place are amendments to the *Poisons and Dangerous Drugs Act*. I wonder if Tarun would advise further on this.

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** Can I just get some clarification here? Are you talking about following on with the



illicit drugs?

**Ms CARTER:** Yes, specifically the task force report, given the recommendations. Anything else for this year in the new initiatives?

**Dr WEERAMANTHRI:** To provide some more detail on the reforms to the *Poisons and Dangerous Drugs Act*, as you know, the current act deals with poisons, pesticides and prescriptions, if you like, and the major reforms that flow on from the task force and which are embedded in amendments to the act particularly is the establishment of the Clinical Advisory Committee for Schedule 8 and restricted Schedule 4 drugs. What this committee does is gives the Chief Health Officer some arm's length advice about policies regarding Schedule 8 and restricted Schedule 4 drugs, as well as advice on how to handle particular practitioners so that it not so personal in terms of a small jurisdiction.

As well as that, the committee has input around policies and training, and accreditation of prescribers. The chief point of the *Poisons and Dangerous Drugs Act* is to control prescribers, that is medical practitioners, and that is the powers of the Chief Health Officer to authorise prescription for the purpose of addiction as well as withdraw that authorisation under certain circumstances.

For the first time, there will be powers given to not just look at Schedule 8 drugs on the advice of the Clinical Advisory Committee, but also consider other Schedule 4 drugs. Schedule 8 drugs are the drugs of addiction; Schedule 4 drugs are the drugs you can get from any medical practitioner, but sometimes some of those drugs can be used in ways that were not intended. The most recent example is injecting Temazepam capsules. So, for the first time, the Chief Health Officer will have some power to regulate Schedule 4 drugs. There are other amendments that will bring our legislation up with best practice interstate legislation, including prohibiting doctors from self-prescribing Schedule 8 drugs, prohibiting scripts from elsewhere for Schedule 8 drugs being able to be filled in the Northern Territory, and making sure that we witness disposal of Schedule 8 drugs and things like that.

The last one I will mention, a key amendment, is the introduction of scheduled substance treatment protocols. What this does is give a formalisation, if you like, to the standing orders issue so that the Chief Health Officer can authorise certain protocols that can be used by nurses and health workers when there is no doctor present, under strict guidelines, and if that person feels competent to do so. So that is giving some kind of legislative support to the practice of remote area practitioners, etcetera. We do have provisions for that in our current act, and we use them, but they are not very flexible, and this construction of scheduled substance treatment protocols allows us to do that more flexibly. All of those recommendations really flow directly out of the Illicit Drugs Task Force.

**Ms CARTER:** Thank you for that. Thank you, minister. Minister, consuming harmful levels of alcohol and other drugs affects many Territorians. Aboriginal people suffer greatly in this area. Your new *Building Healthier Communities* booklet says that one of the aims is: 'Getting serious about Aboriginal health'. Minister, this is a provocative statement, which has been interpreted as a slap in the face by many people in the department who have strived to improve Aboriginal health for decades and had great results, particularly in areas like child and maternal mortality. So given that you are going to get real about Aboriginal health, how are you going to do that with regards to the harm caused by alcohol and other drugs in the next 12 months?

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** In answer to the member's question, I am glad you read *Building Healthier Communities* because it is a fantastic policy framework. One of the things, moving around and talking to a lot of health staff in the system, a lot of people were saying: 'We have to get serious about Aboriginal health'. That was a view that was coming from a lot of the staff and people who were working in the Aboriginal health area. It was not as if we were making a statement that was demeaning or putting down those staff, like in the child protection area. This is certainly an area that I have great interest in, although it is in the responsibility of the Minister for Health. However, that was the reflection of a lot of staff views: getting serious about it.

In relation to the issues of substance abuse, chairing the parliamentary committee for the last three years and working in the area prior to coming into this field, I saw the ravages and impact that

substance abuse has on families. I have, on numerous occasions, talked about it in parliament and said that unless we tackle it, we are not going to get the outcomes in health or education. All of us who have been in that system realise that. That is why we have put that as one of the key priorities in *Building Healthy Communities*.

**Ms CARTER:** Minister, what, specifically targeting Aboriginal people, is going to be done this year with regards to alcohol and other drug use?

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** Whole-of-government is looking at how we develop. For a long time, where we have had the silos across government, for the first time we are getting a greater integration across government programs to start working with families and communities, and those initiatives are happening. One of the other key priority areas is strengthening families and communities. If you work with families, you strengthen those families. That is a good outcome.

**Ms CARTER:** Minister, for some time now, key people in Alice Springs have been calling for the establishment of a residential drug treatment program that will allow people from any racial group to enter the program offered. I understand that you are looking favourably at assisting with the establishment of such a service. Can you advise how much money you will be providing for this service this year, and whether or not it will cover both alcohol and illicit drug use problems.

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** In terms of that, I will defer to Nick Gill.

**Mr GILL:** As I mentioned earlier, we are undertaking a mapping project and a service evaluation across the Territory. I am very much aware, as you would understand, of the calls in Alice Springs for additional services, particularly for illicit drug users from all ethnic and racial groups.

I would be surprised if the mapping exercise did not result in the identification of this as a priority need. However, I do not wish to pre-empt the completion of this process. I am also aware that in 2002–03, Cabinet approved the upgrade of residential drug rehabilitation facilities in the 2003–04 capital works design list to the value of \$2.3m, of which some relates to rehabilitation services in the Top End, and some was intended to relate to services in Alice Springs. Should it turn out, as a result of the mapping exercise, that a facility is required, we will seek to have this placed on the 2005–06 capital works list.

At the moment, no recurrent funding has been isolated for a service in Alice Springs but, again, such an allocation would result from the completion of the mapping and service evaluation exercise.

**Ms CARTER:** Thank you for that. Minister, could you advise how the review of the *Tobacco Act* is going?

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** The *Tobacco Control Act* 2000, which we introduced, came into effect as we all know on 1 January and prohibits smoking in all enclosed places and work places with some exemptions: bars, clubs, gaming areas. In having carriage of this act, I am pleased to say that I have been able to give up smoking.

**Ms CARTER:** Bravo!

**Mr DUNHAM:** Good on you! Well done.

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** I am going into my third month, and I am reaping benefits. If members had been watching the TV last night, they will have seen a program that revealed if you give up smoking in your 40s, you actually add another nine years to your life. So for me, that was a huge incentive to continue with my not smoking.

**Ms CARTER:** We wish you well.

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** Thank you. It means a lot. Look, I think it is a huge achievement and it is certainly something that I have set about working with a lot of my communities, going around and talking about the issue of tobacco. When we talk in the bigger picture of substance abuse we tend to forget, and I know the member for Drysdale has often said this, tobacco and the impact that tobacco has. In terms of practising what you preach, I have certainly done some of that.

I digress because I actually think that that is a great thing to say that that happened.

**Ms CARTER:** You have a right to.

**Mr DUNHAM:** You boast about it!

**Ms CARTER:** So you should

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** A review of the act was foreshadowed to occur after the first 12 months of operation and that was with consultations focussed on stakeholders with a keen interest in the legislation such as health groups, industry and sellers and manufacturers of tobacco products. As I understand it, the review and what we are doing up to date will be completed by late 2004.

**Ms CARTER:** Thank you. Madam Chair, I have no further questions.

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** May I just add to that some of the changes that we have had in the Alcohol and Other Drugs program has caused some delays, but we are now back on track with that.

**Madam ACTING CHAIRMAN:** Are there any other questions on Alcohol and Other Drugs? Member for Nelson? Member for Drysdale.

**Mr DUNHAM:** Minister, can GPs refer clients to the pain clinic directly?

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** To rehab.

**Mr DUNHAM:** I quite like the idea of this advisory group to the Chief Health Officer. You would be aware that there are news reports about people abusing script drugs and it has been a problem here for some time. In fact, the Health Insurance Commission came and did an assessment. Are you planning an assessment of the prescribing practices for Schedule 8 for practitioners in the Northern Territory?

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** To get an appropriate answer for you, member for Drysdale, I might call the Chief Medical Officer back to the table.

**Dr WEERAMANTHRI:** We continuously monitor Schedule 8 prescriptions through Poisons Control. We have some figures, if you would like me to provide them, about the numbers of morphine scripts over the last few years. That shows how we have been monitoring it.

**Mr DUNHAM:** Does it show an increase?

**Dr WEERAMANTHRI:** No. You mentioned the visit of the Health Insurance Commission in 1999.

**Mr DUNHAM:** Yes.

**Dr WEERAMANTHRI:** At the same time, the Department of Health here introduced a voluntary contract scheme for Schedule 8 drugs. I believe as well, around about the same time, the Medical Board got involved with a number of individual practitioners, so the relative contributions of all of those

three things I cannot tell you, but, a main drug which seemed to be being prescribed at a much, much higher rate than the national average was MS Contin. In 1998, there were 8504 scripts for MS Contin; in 2003, that number had fallen to 1948 scripts.

**Mr DUNHAM:** That is very good.

**Dr WEERAMANTHRI:** Having said that, we still acknowledge that there is still an MS Contin issue around in the Territory, but it certainly is of a much lesser magnitude than previously.

**Mr DUNHAM:** That is good news. I was interested, too, when you talked about practitioners being unable to prescribe Schedule 8s to themselves. In a totally anonymous way, just with figures, are you looking at impaired practitioners in the Northern Territory at the moment who have a problem with Schedule 8 drugs?

**Madam ACTING CHAIRMAN:** I just draw the attention of the member for Drysdale to the fact that the questions actually should be directed to the minister, and she, of course, can refer them on.

**Mr DUNHAM:** Minister, can you tell me the numbers of impaired practitioners in the Northern Territory who have a problem with addiction to Schedule 8 drugs?

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** I will defer to the Chief Medical Officer to answer your question, member for Drysdale.

**Dr WEERAMANTHRI:** I don't think it would be appropriate for me to give figures, which are probably the province of the Medical Board and, under the *Medical Act*, that information is obviously confidential.

**Mr DUNHAM:** It is very confidential and I don't want you to divulge it.

**Dr WEERAMANTHRI:** Just to go over the process, though, we would identify through the department any abnormalities or outliers in prescribing patterns and the power the Chief Health Officer has is to both investigate and seek an explanation for any outlying prescribing practices as well as to either refer the practitioner to the Medical Board for further investigation and/or stop the prescriber prescribing Schedule 8 drugs for a period. Usually, those two things happen at the same time.

In relation to your question about impairment, specifically I just note that the amendment to the new *Health Practitioners Act*, which is that omnibus legislation that ties up all the various health practitioners, gives us a much better way, and a much more flexible way, of with dealing with impairment, and from the Medical Board perspective, gives a whole range of options around impairment that we didn't previously have. We can now do performance assessments, set up impaired practitioners panels and deal much more on an individual basis with particular practitioners and look directly at their fitness to practice. I think both of those things are relevant.

**Mr DUNHAM:** You are not prepared to divulge the number? I think what you have described is very good. I understand you being the gateway to it and the Medical Registration Board having the sort of fix-it solutions.

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** I defer to the CEO.

**Mr GRIEW:** I am just suggesting that there could be a situation here with a number. If it were a small number, it could actually lead to identity issues. My preference would be that the Principal Medical Adviser doesn't.

**Mr DUNHAM:** All right. I would prefer to err on the side of confidentiality if that is the case. The information service, the 24 hour information service, who do you get when you ring it? Where does it

go? You can get on a phone a ring up about drugs whether you are a practitioner or whether you are just Joe Average.

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** I will defer to the Acting Director of Alcohol and Other Drugs.

**Mr GILL:** We purchased the services of the alcohol and drug information service from Turning Point Alcohol and Drug Centre in Melbourne, which is a nationally respected centre of excellence in both academic research and provision of a wide range of alcohol and other drug services. Turning Point in Melbourne provide the ADIS service not only for Victoria, but also for New South Wales and some other jurisdictions. When you ring the ADIS line, you get one of a group of qualified, trained staff at Turning Point in Melbourne. If you ring the DACAS line, that is the line for clinical assistance, what happens is that it is answered, again, from Turning Point in Melbourne, but they have a panel of highly qualified, expert practitioners in Alcohol and Other Drugs, whom they will telephone with your query, and you will get - they guarantee a turnaround - you will get a call back from a relevant specialist within 10 minutes. So it is a very good service.

**Mr DUNHAM:** Through the minister, given that the drugs of choice up here are radically different from Melbourne, and given that the minister's priority task is Aboriginal clientele, and I do not have a problem with that, do you think this is a particularly relevant service, to be ringing Melbourne from Amoonguna about problems relating to drugs? What I am saying is: have you tested it? They might be good, world class, great researchers. Is it appropriate to a Northern Territory clientele?

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** But the setting up of that, member for Drysdale, as I understand it, because you were talking about the illicit drugs, the setting up of that line was in response to that recommendation.

**Mr DUNHAM:** Yes, but it is now in use. What I am asking you is: are you happy that Northern Territory clientele, many of whom might be Aboriginal people abusing drugs that they have no knowledge of in Melbourne - for instance, kava - using that line? Is it an appropriate service to address the priority needs that you described?

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** I will ask Nick answer this more fully.

**Mr GRIEW:** May I make a comment first? There is a general issue with providing 24 hour counselling lines with any kind of back-up for a small population, so there is always a judgment to be made. A resident 24-hour service in a specialist niche area like this would be an impossibility, or near to it, especially with that sort of back-up. This was a response to recommendations that related specifically to illicit drugs, and that is a service that is more than a research centre; it is a service that is nationally known and respected for its provisional services in the area of illicit drugs. It provides training all over Australia to service providers. The director of it is a kind of figure of national and international repute in the area. It is quite an extraordinary service. Targeting illicit drug use, there is not going to be a gap in knowledge in that service at all and, yes, there is always a trade-off here between the extent of coverage we can manage and the diversity of cultures here, but the diversity of cultures they deal with in that service is pretty extensive as well.

**Mr DUNHAM:** I was interested with your use of Buprenorphine and methadone, and wonder why you had not also used Naltrexone in that choice?

**Dr WEERAMANTHRI:** The opiate pharmacotherapy program is a substitution and withdrawal program, and Naltrexone is a rapid withdrawal, highly specialised treatment, which is of much less proven efficacy in fact. It is newer and it has got a lot of publicity, but the evidence in favour of it compared with, you know, slower forms of withdrawal is not actually that great. You would need a highly specialised in-patient unit to be running a Naltrexone service, and I have not actually heard much discussion or much clamour, or any clamour at all, for such a service locally.

**Mr DUNHAM:** There were Territorians going to other states to access Naltrexone programs. I was thinking more after withdrawal to use Naltrexone as a means of maintaining abstinence.

**Mr WEERAMANTHRI:** I am sorry; I will have to plead my ignorance about Naltrexone as a maintenance.

**Mr DUNHAM:** I suppose the question, minister, is: are you happy with the suite of drugs you have available to you?

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** Look, in terms of you wanting to get the answer to this, let me also ask Nick Gill.

**Mr GILL:** Nationally, there has been a great deal of interest in Naltrexone as a long-term therapy assisting people to maintain abstinence. There are problems with it, as you would be aware. If people who are on Naltraxone then choose ...

**Mr DUNHAM:** Not to be abstinent, it's a big problem for them.

**Mr GILL:** ... not to be abstinent, there may be major problems, often leading to death. There has been some call, and there is some national investigation going towards the utilisation of Naltraxone implants in some patients. These are being recommended by some doctors in Western Australia who seem to have a vested interest perhaps. However, Naltraxone as a long-term therapy certainly, as Dr Weeramanthri said, does not compare to Methadone, which, as we all know, is referred to the gold standard in treatment of opioid addiction.

**Mr DUNHAM:** Through you, minister, you would be aware that Methadone has been implicated in many more overdose deaths than Naltraxone has. You would be aware of it?

**Mr GILL:** Yes. It has, of course, been used for a much longer time and ...

**Ms Carter:** Ah! Statistics.

**Mr DUNHAM:** I am a pro-Naltraxone person, I have to tell you; I have seen it being used. No, that will do for now.

**Madam ACTING CHAIRMAN:** Member for Nelson, one of your favourite topics.

**Mr WOOD:** Not really - unless iced coffee has been put on the 'other drugs' list. Minister, when you and I were together on the substance abuse committee, there was talk about what help could be given to people who, basically, went round and round the revolving door. Has your department looked at an alternative or options for those sorts of people? I refer to ideas that were floating around in the Alice Springs meetings about places where they could take people for training or take them away from the community for a while. They were talking about having a magistrate having to order it, but it would be where someone had tried and tried to help them and they could not help themselves. Has that been looked at any further, or is it on the back-burner?

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** No. None of it has been put on the back-burner in terms of tackling substance abuse. We all saw it on the parliamentary committee; the *ad hoc* nature of services, and the separation between substance abuse services and mental health services. One of the things that we are endeavouring to do in FACS is look at an integration and more working together of mental health and substance abuse services, but not from just our government point of view.

There are a lot of non-government organisations that are involved in this and also need to be supported and worked through. Certainly, if you look at the Alcohol and Other Drugs budget, a good percentage of that money is actually out in the non-government area. So it is not on the back-burner; there is some pulling together and trying to look at the whole issue of compulsory treatment, and areas that need to be addressed, but that raises implications for other areas that need to be brought in and considered.

**Mr WOOD:** Thanks, minister. On the same line, you have in your performance measures, and this is the sobering-up shelters, their admissions, but how many are individuals? Can we assess from there how many of the same person is part of that 19 100?

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** We can get that information if you ...

**Mr DUNHAM:** An ear tag would do it.

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** I defer to Nick Gill.

**Mr GILL:** It is not possible because the figures, of course, in the budget papers are overall estimates. Now, what I can do is let you know about the number of admissions and the number of individuals to which that refers for the first nine months of the current financial year, that is from 1 July 2003 to 31 March 2004. During that time into our sobering up shelters, there were a total of 12 848 admissions and these corresponded to some 3820 individuals. Of those individuals, 3565 of them were admitted between one and 10 times over that nine months period; 161 individuals were admitted between 11 and 20 times; and 94 individuals were admitted more than 20 times during that nine month period. So this is actually a small percentage of the users of sobering up shelters using them at a very high rate.

**Mr WOOD:** I suppose, minister, they are the ones I call the revolving door, although 10 times would be probably be regarded as a revolving door. You have a number of people who, I would presume, we have to help in some way. Obviously, by the number of times they have been through there, one could ask whether they are past the point of no return. I don't think anyone is past the point of no return, but they certainly must be people that are having difficulty overcoming their problems. Would they be the people you would be targeting under what you said previously to the previous question? Is that the group you are looking at?

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** Yes.

**Mr WOOD:** With the closed episodes in both non-government and government services, although it says closed, and I think there is a description under number 2 explaining what an episode of alcohol is and other drug treatment, the period of contact, etcetera, but is there a percentage of those people, you have 2150, who basically come back again? It is closed between point A and point B.

**Mr GILL:** As we know, addiction is a chronic recurring disease. It is very unusual for an individual to recover from an addictive pattern of behaviour on their first encounter with a treatment service. Indeed, the great majority of people who are addicts probably come back four or five times to the same service. I don't have the figures on how many of these individuals have contacted services before, nor do we routinely prepare such statistics. I am speaking as a service provider myself with many years experience in it. It is a very bad idea to label somebody as a hopeless case by saying you have been back in this service so many times.

The services that the Alcohol and other Drug program funds don't do that. We don't ring each other up and say: 'Don't take Freddy because we've taken him in five times this year already'. Nobody knows whether it is actually going to be the sixth time that Freddy is going to get the message. So I do not have those figures.

**Mr WOOD:** Minister, the community education and community development activities go from 60 to 100. What are the extra community development activities?

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** I defer to the Assistant Secretary.

**Ms PELTOLA:** We believe that there are some efficiencies to be gained in our Community Education and Community Development program. We are going to be providing some centralised support to those community educators and community development officers, and we are going to ensure that

they have a broad focus in the work that they do, so we are anticipating that with that additional support for the community educators, they will be able to be more outreaching to more people within communities.

**Mr WOOD:** Finally, minister, advertising: I might be wrong here, but I am presuming that in the days of *Living with Alcohol*, you have taken over some of that role. In the days of *Living with Alcohol*, we used to see some really good ads on TV, something that is missed today. Is your department looking at doing something similar and/or are you funded to do something similar?

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** I agree with you about the ads that formed part of the *Living with Alcohol* program, and I think all of us have seen those ads in the past. In terms of the campaign, we just need to confirm whether it is for the current financial year.

**Mr WOOD:** What you intend to do; that would be better.

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** Some of the campaigns - Smoke Free NT is one of them, Sober Bob, the Christmas and Easter campaigns, the indigenous Quit campaign, ADIS and DACAS campaigns - but they will flow on to the next financial year.

**Mr WOOD:** Anything similar to the *Living with Alcohol* type of advertising?

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** Would it follow the same pattern, did you say, as *Living with Alcohol*?

**Mr WOOD:** A similar style, because Sober Bob is about having ...

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** That is something that we are going to have to consider, member for Nelson. It is something that we can certainly look at as part of the campaigns in the next financial year.

**Mr WOOD:** Okay, thank you.

**Madam ACTING CHAIRMAN:** All right, no further questions? Yes, there are.

**Dr LIM:** Just a couple of short questions, if I may. Minister, Greengates has been trying to get itself running for quite a few years. It has done a lot of lobbying and has been unsuccessful. Some four years ago, it nearly got up when it obtained a house in the old East Side. Unfortunately, due to the Development Consent Authority, it lost out when the neighbourhood objected. Minister, are you providing any assistance or support for Greengates to at least get up and running?

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** As the Director of Alcohol and Other Drugs said before, there was a review of treatment services and funding in the mapping exercise. Part of that mapping exercise, as he said, was looking at the need for a new rehabilitation service and looking at some of the gaps that are there. With some of the consultation that is happening as part of this, looking at the analysis and the demand for the service, at the last Community Cabinet when I was in Alice Springs, I met with representatives of Greengates, as I have met Greengates representatives when they gave evidence at the Parliamentary Committee when we were in Alice Springs. As I expressed about the mapping exercise that was going on, any new service that would come out of that mapping service would need to be tendered as part of an open procurement process, and Greengates would be able to submit a proposal at that time, just like anyone else who wanted to.

**Dr LIM:** In the meantime, there is no medical detox of any kind in Alice Springs, and people who want to detox have to do it at home on their own. Is there some support that the department is providing?

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** I thought there was. I defer to Mr Gill.

**Mr GILL:** The Alcohol and Other Drugs program funds the Drug and Alcohol Services Association in



Alice Springs to provide, at the moment, five beds, and under the Community Harmony Strategy, a new building is about to take place, and an additional six detox beds will be provided. Now, these are broadly described as non-medical detoxes, however the CAAOGS - Central Australian Alcohol and Other Drugs Services - clinical team provides medical supervision and assistance for clients detoxing at DASA. I can say that over the last 12 months, a considerably increased number of clients have gone through the DASA detox program.

**Dr LIM:** Through you, minister, you say that there are five beds available at DASA for non-medical detox, however those clients are being supervised by medical staff from the Alice Springs Hospital or from CAAOGS, is that right, minister?

**Mr GILL:** To clarify: the clinical treatment of those clients is provided by the CAAOGS clinical team, and that was the sense in which I used the term 'supervised'. The clients are looked after, not, however, by nursing staff; they are looked after by care working staff, and this is why it is described as a non-medical detox. Obviously, detoxification that involves complex withdrawal is referred to the Alice Springs Hospital where a full medical detox will take place.

**Madam ACTING CHAIRMAN:** Any further questions?

**Mr DUNHAM:** Minister, I would like to talk about inhalant substance abuse. Could you either advise your colleague, the Health minister, that his publicity stunt was foolish in the extreme in buying several cans of paint or, alternatively, would you look at your budget providing enough to buy all the paint and all the petrol in the Northern Territory?

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** In answer to your question, I do not think the stunt that the minister for Health did was foolish. If more of us took on ...

**Mr DUNHAM:** He bought paint.

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** Well, it is not foolish. If you want to make a cheap joke about that ...

**Mr DUNHAM:** It was a cheap stunt.

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** Well, it was not a cheap stunt.

**Mr DUNHAM:** It trivialises an important issue.

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** I do not think it trivialised it.

**Madam ACTING CHAIRMAN:** All right. I am aware of the time. We have just 30 minutes now for the Environment and Heritage portfolio, and ...

**Mr DUNHAM:** Forty.

**Madam ACTING CHAIRMAN:** ... forty, and I say 30 because I know there are some non-specific output questions to come from your shadow and others. I appreciate the political nature of your question, member for Drysdale ...

**Mr DUNHAM:** It was not political; the stunt was political. What I am trying to point out is that the minister should either caution him against being so stupid and trivialising the problem.

**Madam ACTING CHAIRMAN:** You cannot ask one minister to caution another.

**Mr DUNHAM:** Or, alternatively, the budget has to address the potential of removing these risks, and to remove all the paint in the Northern Territory is probably going to cost half of your Alcohol and Other Drugs budget. So, counsel him, will you?

**Madam ACTING CHAIRMAN:** Right, any other questions on 6.3? There being no other questions on 6.3, we will close Output Group 6.0 and move to non-output specific questions.

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** Madam Acting Chairman, just before we go to the non-output areas, there were some questions that were taken on notice. I could go through some of them and provide some of those responses now for the shadow.

**Madam ACTING CHAIRMAN:** It is up to you, but the process normally is just to table what they need.

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** I will table them. They deal with 9.1, 9.2, 9.4 and 9.5.

**Ms CARTER:** Thank you.

### **Non-Output Specific Questions**

**Madam ACTING CHAIRMAN:** Okay. Shadow Minister?

**Ms CARTER:** Just the one. Minister, what is the percentage increase in grant funding that non-government organisations will receive from this 2004–05 Budget, given that CPI runs at least at 3 per cent? Will they get an increase to cover at least CPI?

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** Before I refer this question to the CEO to answer, there has been a significant budget increase in terms of NGOs. However, in terms of the details of just how much that is, I will hand that to the CEO.

**Mr GRIEW:** This question came up under the health outputs as well. The policy here is a whole-of-government position in that we use the CPI index announced by the Treasurer in the budget speech. In 2003–04, this was 2.2 per cent. In some joint Commonwealth-state programs, for example the Home and Community Care Program or the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program, there is a specific index or the Commonwealth index is a different rate, which can take it either up or down.

The other point to make here is that, like a number of other state governments, the government puts specific support in place for NGOs as a result of the public liability insurance crisis, HIH and other issues that impacted. Indeed, with the removal of the HIH levy, that has taken out 0.5 per cent cost pressure off the NGOs, but that funding is not being withdrawn.

The only other point to make here is that we do acknowledge that NGOs have a number of scale problems, critical mass problems, operating in a jurisdiction of this size and have been working with organisations like NTCOSS to look at how we can achieve rationalisation in terms of oncosts borne by these organisation. Not everyone has to have a photocopier; that could be shared. Not everyone has to pay rent; that can be shared. It is that sort of thing.

**Madam ACTING CHAIRMAN:** Are there any questions from other members of the committee? Okay. That concludes consideration of the Health and Community Services Output Group. On behalf of the committee, I would like to thank officers of Health and Community Services for attending this evening.

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** Madam Acting Chairman, I would like to thank my CEO and all staff on the record.

### **ENVIRONMENT AND HERITAGE**

**Madam ACTING CHAIRMAN:** I welcome the minister and invite her to introduce the officials

accompanying her and, if she wishes, to make an opening statement on the portfolio area of Environment and Heritage.

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** Thank you, Madam Chair. I would like to introduce Barry Chambers, the Chief Executive Officer of the Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Environment, and Steve Sutton, Acting Director of the Office of Environment and Heritage. I would like to make some brief very brief, introductory comments given the time.

As Minister for the Environment and Heritage, the Office of Environment and Heritage reports to me. As such, I have responsibility for the outputs under Environment and Heritage in Budget Paper No 3, namely Environmental Protection Services, Heritage Conservation Services and the Greenhouse Policy. In the interests of economies of scale, the office structurally resides within the Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Environment. From this department, the office receives logistical support in a number of areas. Whole-of-government questions, such as IT costs and other corporate overheads have previously been put to the minister for Infrastructure, Lands and Planning.

There has been a significant increase in this year's budget for Environment and Heritage and I look forward to answering questions.

#### **OUTPUT GROUP 2.0 – Environment and Heritage**

**Madam ACTING CHAIRMAN:** The committee will proceed to consider the Estimates of proposed expenditure contained in the Appropriation Bill 2004-05 as they relate to Environment and Heritage. I call for questions on output group 2.0 and, at the request of the Shadow Minister, we will consider the line of 2.0 Environment and Heritage, before going onto to Output Group 2.1.

**Mr BALDWIN:** Thank you, Madam Deputy Chair. Minister, it is just a reconciliation of the budget amounts that are shown there under Output Group 2.0. The amount allocated and appropriated in the 2003-04 Budget for the Environment and Heritage was \$3.917m, and in the 2004-05 Budget you have estimated that that will come now at \$4.995m. I am looking for a reconciliation of the difference there.

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** I defer to the Chief Executive.

**Mr CHAMBERS:** Mr Baldwin, were you looking for the difference between the 2003-04 estimate and the 2004-05 Budget, or from the ...

**Mr BALDWIN:** From the 2003-04 estimate in the actual allocation in 2003-04, which has now, in these budget papers, you are estimating to come at a higher level of \$4.995m, so the reconciliation between those estimates.

**Mr CHAMBERS:** Largely, those were related to the reallocation in that financial year of the DCIS notional charges. That had to flow through. The \$10.7m allocated to DIPE flowed through to all of the different programs and outputs. Movements in all of our programs, a lot of them from 2003-04 original budget to the 2003-04 estimated outcomes were largely driven by the reallocation of the DCIS charges, but there were other things. There was money added in for a litter abatement strategy, which was also had a significant amount added in during that financial year as an extra from the time of the 2003-04 budget.

**Mr BALDWIN:** Can I interrupt a moment to save you repeating all of this? Have you actually got the reconciled amounts? That is what I'm looking for; the figures that reconcile with two numbers and what they are of course.

**Mr CHAMBERS:** Not on one single page, unless we have it on another ...

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** No, because it needs to come across the whole lot, as I understand it. What you are asking comes into those ...

**Mr CHAMBERS:** Yes, it is the sum of those. So, if you look at Environment Protection Services, it received 325 extra for the Litter Abatement Strategy, DCIS notional charges of \$282 000 were added, external and NT- funded projects not finalised in 2003 was 38 000, increase in corporate overheads that were redistributed was 77 000 to this output, and transfer of electricity costs from what were in corporate overheads were distributed back out to the outputs to fund directly.

In Heritage Conservation Services, there was additional funding in 2003-04 for external projects that were not finalised in 2002-03 so they would have been carried forward, 200000, DCIS notional charges there were 96. This program had a reduction in corporate overheads of 13 and -1 for depreciation, and in the Greenhouse Policy output, there was additional funding of 42 for DCIS notional charges and external projects that weren't finalised in 2002-03 was +38. This one had a decrease in corporate overheads of 13. The nett effect of that represented the difference between the 2003-04 original budget and the 2003-04 revised estimate.

**Mr BALDWIN:** Can you do the same for me for the allocation for the 2004-05 period?

**Mr CHAMBERS:** Yes. Between the 2003-04 estimated outcome and the 2004-05 Budget, Environment Protection Services has received additional funding for voluntary environment grants of \$200 000, Keep Australia Beautiful funds that were transferred from the Department of Community Development, Sport and Cultural Affairs were 160 000. The full year effect of electricity transfers and some overheads stuff was 7000 and that was then offset by a reduction in 38 000, which was the extra in the previous year, so that was taken off for those externally funded projects, and there were some parameter adjustments for CPI and that was -16 000.

For Heritage, additional funding in 2004-05, there is an extra \$1m for repairs and maintenance, parameter adjustments were an extra 23 000 and some additional depreciation brought to account of 2000. That was offset by the reduction in 2004-05 for that 200 000 that was externally funded in 2003-04, so that was 200 000 off the balance.

In Greenhouse Policy, there is an apparent reduction in funding in 2004-05 of 38 000, which was largely due to the fact that the previous year had +38 000, so if you go back to the 2003-04 original budget, it was 440 000, but in 2004-05 it is 468 000. We are pretty much a line ball in Greenhouse Policy.

**Mr BALDWIN:** Can we just go back to Environment Protection Services? You mentioned 200 000 for grants, was it?

**Mr CHAMBERS:** The voluntary environmental grants.

**Mr BALDWIN:** Could you explain those?

**Madam ACTING CHAIRMAN:** Is this under 2.1? Can we move on from 2.0 to 2.1 now that you have dealt with that question?

**Mr BALDWIN:** It is in discrepancy.

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** Have we moved on to that output?

**Madam ACTING CHAIRMAN:** No, we are still on 2.0.

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** The \$200 000 that you are talking about is the new grants program, member for Daly.

**Mr BALDWIN:** For what?

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** For 2004-05.

**Mr BALDWIN:** Yes, but what are they for?

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** They are there for community and environment groups to apply through a grants process for funding to run environment projects.

**Mr BALDWIN:** Okay. That is all I wanted to know. Just one other – no, I will leave that one. We are going to non-specific outputs?

**Madam ACTING CHAIRMAN:** We are, absolutely.

**Mr BALDWIN:** Okay, I can move on then to 2.1.

**Madam ACTING CHAIRMAN:** Are there any other questions on 2.0? That closes 2.0.

**Output 2.1 – Environment Protection Services**

**Mr BALDWIN:** Minister, the Environment Committee of this parliament recommended building a fence across the neck of Coburg Peninsula. Was that supported by your department?

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** I think that is totally irrelevant to this output. That question should have been put to the Minister for Parks and Wildlife. I cannot see the relevance of why you are putting that question to me.

**Mr BALDWIN:** Protection of the environment.

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** It is not in my area. It is in the Minister for Parks and Wildlife, and if you wanted to you should have put that question to that minister. He was here today.

**Mr BALDWIN:** So you do not have a view on that at all?

**Madam ACTING CHAIRMAN:** I will point out that it actually does fall under Parks and Wildlife in terms of the output.

**Mr BALDWIN:** I am asking the minister whether she has a view.

**Madam ACTING CHAIRMAN:** She has indicated that it is a question you should appropriately have put to her ministerial colleague, the Minister for Parks and Wildlife, so I am ruling that the minister has answered, that she is not answering because it not appropriate for her; it is appropriate for another minister.

**Mr BALDWIN:** Okay, so environmental damage caused by cane toads is not an issue for this office.

**Madam ACTING CHAIRMAN:** You know, you can lecture me as long as you want but you are wasting your time.

**Mr BALDWIN:** I am not, I am asking the question.

**Madam ACTING CHAIRMAN:** You are wasting your own time.

**Mr BALDWIN:** Minister, you would be aware that businesses around town are having a lot of trouble disposing of waste oil at this time because contractors in Darwin are refusing to take it because of storage capacity limitations, or the storage is actually at capacity, the way I understand it, in Darwin and the market down south is not calling for any more, and therefore the potential for illegal disposal

is probably very high, I would imagine. What is your department doing to ameliorate this?

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** That is a good question, and I know that the member for Nelson also asked it in the last parliamentary sittings. Waste or lubricating oil is an important waste issue for the Territory. We do not want to see it dumped where it can cause pollution. The current problems, I am advised, have arisen from a number of circumstances, including reduced volume processed at the Mataranka lime kiln, and some bulk storage problems and some transport issues. The Office of Environment and Heritage is talking with the major waste management companies and the automotive industry to see whether there are ways we can improve the situation. The industry has contacted my office and we are setting up a meeting so that we can have a discussion, myself and the minister for Industry, and look at how we can address this issue.

**Mr BALDWIN:** One of the issues is that the storage tank that is currently being used is the one over at Stokes Hill. It is government-owned, as you would be aware, and government is asking the current contractor using that storage tank to remove their oil. Would it not be an easy solution, albeit a short-term one, to allow that contractor to have an extended period of time?

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** I will refer that question to the Acting Director.

**Mr SUTTON:** It is my understanding that the tank at Stokes Hill has already been emptied, and alternative storage for that oil has been found or the oil has been transhipped interstate. It is further our understanding that the tying up of transport facilities, a truck and a tank, to relocate that oil led to some short-term unavailability of service in the local area. However, now that that oil has been removed, that problem does not continue.

**Mr BALDWIN:** Minister, the big problem is local storage and because government is insisting they have to remove it, it has caused a shortage of storage. One of the solutions is to allow a little bit longer term storage, one would expect.

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** In answer to your question, member for Daly, transporting is only one part of it, and I will defer to the Acting Executive Director to, again, go over what he just said.

**Mr SUTTON:** The storage capacity of tanks in the Darwin area is a component but by no means the major component of the recent short-term problems in getting rid of waste oil. The Territory produces something to the order of 6 000 000 litres of waste oil each year. There is storage capacity for something in the order of 1.6 million litres of waste oil. Therefore, in any given year, clearly, that storage capacity is going to be over-topped dramatically by the amount of oil that is produced.

So there is a transport issue. The transport issue has been exacerbated in the past by the contamination of waste oil produced, with water and other products. Contamination of the oil makes it less desirable as a recycling product. No one wants to buy it because it is contaminated; it is not suitable for firing boilers and so on. It also means it is inefficient to transport because the tankers are carrying a certain percentage of water with the oil, and they get nothing for the oil. The traditional method for reducing the amount water in the oil in the Top End has been to pour it in a tank, and the member for Daly referred to the Stokes Hill tank. That tank was filled with sludgy oil and left to sit for a very long period of time, with the effect that the oil and water separate and then the top layer of oil was removed and trucked to the Mataranka facility.

We are informed that the major waste oil collector and removal firm in Darwin has recently spent quite a considerable amount on capital investment to construct boilers that will allow them to remove the water from the waste oil. That will further enable them to be able to move on the waste oil that they have because they will have a product that is not sludgy; they will be able to sell it more readily interstate and it will be more efficient to transport. The advice that we have is that, when that is implemented, the problem of waste oil that we have seen in recent times will, by and large, disappear.

**Mr BALDWIN:** Though you, minister, that means that the local storage capacity is sufficient for the Northern Territory?

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** Didn't I say that before?

**Mr BALDWIN:** I do not know. I am asking.

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** I am sure I answered it.

**Mr BALDWIN:** What did you say, then, if you answered it?

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** Let me go back to what I was saying: yes. Would you like me to re-read everything that I said before?

**Mr BALDWIN:** No, no.

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** Well you asked me before.

**Mr DUNHAM:** You have 6 000 000 litres, and you have 1.6 million litres worth of storage.

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** You asked me before.

**Mr BALDWIN:** If you think you gave me the answer, I will look at *Hansard*. Can I just ask through you, then, the sludging part of the oil that is still in the Stokes Hill Wharf tank, is it still there? Is that what you were saying about the boilers? Are they going to take the sludge out?

**Mr SUTTON:** I am not quite sure about the status of the bottom few inches of the Stokes Hill tank. There may well still be some sludge in it. The reference I was making was to sludgy oil in general. The boilers have not been obtained to deal with the sludge from Stokes Hill. It was purchased to deal with the whole ...

**Mr BALDWIN:** So is the Stokes Hill Wharf totally empty now, minister?

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** I defer to the Chief Executive Officer.

**Mr CHAMBERS:** Mr Baldwin, the tanks down there for some time have been used. That goes back several years. The people using it have had notice over many years that it was a temporary storage facility. I do not think there is really an issue in terms of having provided them adequate notice in terms of the steps they need to take. Mr Sutton has outlined the fact that the industry has responded. What we are left with, though, is a tank that is sitting in the city water front development and that tank is listed for disposal and the site to be cleaned up. That is one of the issues that is being picked up in the environmental assessment process for the whole city water front development.

In terms of the sludge that is in it, it needs to be disposed of and they are currently looking at various options of how you might dispose of that because it really has no use. They range from incineration, which would be expensive, through to probably what is a more likely scenario and that is that it would be disposed of by biodegradation. I am not sure of the technical term ...

**Mr BALDWIN:** Dispersal.

**Mr CHAMBERS:** ... dispersal or whatever, but in open ground. So they are currently looking at sites where that might be feasible to do that are environmentally okay in which to dispose of it.

**Mr BALDWIN:** Just to clarify this, is it the responsibility of the government to do that, the consortia or the contractor?

**Mr CHAMBERS:** No, the government is taking on the responsibility for environmental clean up and that is why we are working on it now.

**Mr BALDWIN:** Minister, there was an article in the newspaper about waste oil treatment being put on hold and it is Transpacific Industry that has obviously obtained approval to construct the treatment and storage facility for a wide range of liquid waste materials at Hudson Creek where they have a site. However, a spokesman has said that:

*... it would not be economically viable to proceed with the integrated liquid waste treatment facility while government subsidised low technology disposal alternatives were permitted.*

What is the government subsidy involved?

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** I will defer to the Acting Executive Director.

**Mr SUTTON:** The article to which the member for Daly referred to was not particularly clear in what it referred to in regard to subsidies. There is no subsidisation that the Office of Environment and Heritage provides for the disposal of waste oil. The Chief Executive may refer to whether DIPE provides any subsidy. Our interpretation of that article was that it had misunderstood some of the interactions that Power and Water currently has in the management of liquid waste in general, and perceives that in some form as a subsidy. There was no strength to the position adopted by Transpacific as far as we could see.

**Mr BALDWIN:** So the newspaper got it wrong. Is that what you are saying?

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** Read what you will into that, member for Daly.

**Mr BALDWIN:** Well, they often do.

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** Well, you are saying it. I am not saying it. You are the one saying it.

**Mr BALDWIN:** I know you are not saying it. You are not saying much.

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** You want your questions answered; we are giving you the answers.

**Mr BALDWIN:** The Northern Quoll project, minister, with which you would be very familiar, where quolls were removed from the mainland to Arnhem Land coastal islands, how is that project going?

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** Through the Chair, this question should have been referred, appropriately, to the Minister for Parks and Wildlife.

**Mr BALDWIN:** Okay. Well, on that issue, let us not talk about the animals. Let us talk about the environmental impact. What I want to know is: was there any sort of environmental impact carried out with the translocation of this species from one area where they are to an area where they are not?

**Madam ACTING CHAIRMAN:** I am conscious of the time and to facilitate the answer, whether it satisfies you or not, the environmental impact was carried out by Parks and Wildlife, so really the answer to your ...

**Mr BALDWIN:** I am asking the environment minister. Let her answer it.

**Madam ACTING CHAIRMAN:** But it falls under a different portfolio.

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** I am sure, member for Daly, if this had been put to the minister for Parks and



Wildlife, I am sure the department ...

**Mr BALDWIN:** We ran out of time.

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** It is not my fault that you ran out of time. I am sure that Parks and Wildlife would have had a look at this issue. That is something that ...

**Mr BALDWIN:** So the Office of Environment and Heritage had no ...

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** It is under the responsibility of Parks and Wildlife.

**Mr BALDWIN:** Okay. The litter abatement program: you said there is \$325 000 for litter abatement. Could you explain to me how that strategy will work?

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** In terms of litter abatement for 2004-05, the government will spend approximately \$604 500 to implement the Litter Abatement and Resource Recovery strategy, and that will include \$250 000 for Keep Australia Beautiful to run the 2004 Territory Tidy Towns awards, \$247 450 in grants from the Litter Abatement and Resource Recovery Fund, and there is an amount for the continued employment for the Litter Abatement Officer who works with the Litter Abatement Committee.

**Mr BALDWIN:** Okay. What was the second thing you mentioned there, the Litter Abatement Fund? I want to know what the strategy is. That is what I'm asking.

**Madam ACTING CHAIRMAN:** The small grants?

**Mr BALDWIN:** No, the resource recovery program. I know what Territory Tidy Towns is.

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** Member for Daly, was it the 347 450 that you asked for? It is grants from the Litter Abatement and Resource Recovery Fund. That's it? All right. That money is overseen by the Litter Abatement Advisory Committee, which is now up and running. The grants are advertised and various communities and groups put in their submissions and that committee then determines the grants through that process.

**Mr BALDWIN:** What is the criteria for the applications? What can they put in for?

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** Community projects and programs that different groups may want to run. I mean, it is looking at how to reduce litter. The whole point of this recovery fund is putting the money back on the ground where it counts. It is open to community organisations and other environment groups, everyone. It is an open, transparent process. It is advertised and groups can apply through that process to the committee for funding to be allocated for programs.

**Mr BALDWIN:** What is the outcome you are trying to achieve for that money?

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** That everyone has access to funds to be able to undertake environmental projects and community grass roots initiatives. Is there anything wrong with that?

**Mr BALDWIN:** It is not an environment project, is it? Isn't it litter abatement funding?

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** It is about reducing litter. We want to see litter reduced and recycling improved across the Territory. This grants program allows community organisations to do this.

**Mr BALDWIN:** So the outcome would be a reduction in waste, litter and that sort of thing. Is that what you are looking to achieve?

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** The goal of it, and objective, is to see litter reduced and recycling improved across the Territory.

**Mr BALDWIN:** That is all I was trying to get from you, minister.

**Mr WOOD:** It's a good goal, that.

**Madam ACTING CHAIRMAN:** Any other questions?

**Mr BALDWIN:** Yes, I have got pages of them, but I am not going to get through them, unfortunately. I have a whole range of questions on the Glyde Point development. Minister, what is your office's involvement in that EIS, the impact studies that are going on for Glyde Point industrial estate?

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** I will refer that question to the Acting Executive Director.

**Mr SUTTON:** The role of the Office of Environment and Heritage will be to establish the guidelines for any environmental assessment that will be required and to assess any environmental impact statement that comes forth out of that process. We have allocated a notional amount for that work in 2004-05, and we await the Notices of Intent.

**Mr BALDWIN:** So how much has been allocated?

**Mr SUTTON:** The notional amount that we have allocated, and it is an estimate because until you have got the document in your hands it is a bit difficult to judge how long a piece of string is, but at the moment we are allocating \$51 000.

**Mr BALDWIN:** Which, one would assume, is not enough to complete that in 2004-05.

**Mr SUTTON:** That money comprises staff time and that would be a substantial proportion of a full-time P2, which may not, indeed, cover the entire cost, but is a reasonable guesstimate about the costs. It could be a bit more, it could be a bit less, depending on how complex or straightforward the impact assessment documents are.

**Mr BALDWIN:** Minister, what role will the Commonwealth Department of Environment play in that assessment process?

**Ms SCRYMGOUR:** As I understand it, member for Daly, the project will be referred to the Commonwealth, but I will defer to the Acting Executive Director to answer your question.

**Mr SUTTON:** As is normal for any development that has the potential to have a significant impact on the environment, this project is referred to the Commonwealth for a review against the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act*, which is the Commonwealth legislation, to determine whether or not it is a controlled action under the various triggers for that legislation. That has been done, and the Commonwealth has determined that it is a controlled action and has invoked the bilateral agreement for assessment, which the Territory has with the Commonwealth, so the assessment will proceed under Territory legislation.

**Madam ACTING CHAIRMAN:** All right. That concludes consideration of this Output Group because the time has expired, Shadow Minister.

On behalf of the committee, I would like to thank the officers of the Office of Environment and Heritage for attending today, and thank you for your cooperation. That concludes this Estimates hearing.

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The Committee adjourned.

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EDITOR'S NOTE: This concludes the Estimates Committee hearings for 2004. The Government Owned Corporation Scrutiny Committee convened on Friday 25 June to consider the Statement of Corporate Intent of the Power and Water Corporation. That Committee's deliberations appear as a separate transcript in the Estimates suite.